

Short Stories.

No. 730.]

Week ending December 27, 1902.

[Price One Penny.]



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(A Pathetic Incident from our Complete Story, "For Her Sake." See inside.)

Short Stories.

No. 730.

For the Week Ending December 27th, 1902.

ONE PENNY.

OUR NEW SERIAL STORY.

THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY



♦ ♦ A Romance of To-day. ♦ ♦

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE IN THE WEST END.

An affair of some magnitude—perhaps a remarkable crime—has taken place in an Albert Gate Mansion.

Owing to the reticence of the authorities, it is at present impossible to arrive at a definite conclusion as to the nature or extent of the incident, but it is quite certain that public interest will be much excited when details are forthcoming. All sorts of rumours attain credence in the locality, the murder of several prominent persons being not the least persistent of these. Without, however, giving currency to idle speculation, several authentic statements may be grouped into a connected form.

Four weeks ago a party of Turkish gentlemen of high rank in Constantinople, arrived in London and took up their abode in the house in question, after some structural alterations pointing at great security within and without, had been planned and executed.

Attending these Turkish gentlemen, or officials, was a numerous suite of Moslem guards and servants, whilst, immediately following their arrival, came from Amsterdam, some dozen noted experts in the diamond-cutting industry. These were lodged in a neighbouring private hotel, where they were extremely uncommunicative as to their business in London. They were employed during the day at the Albert Gate house. The presence in the mansion, both day and night, of a strong force of Metropolitan police, tended to excite local curiosity to an intense degree, but no clear conception of the business of the occupants was allowed to reach the public.

Whatever it was that took place, the full particulars were not only well-known to the authorities—the presence of the police hints even at Governmental sanction—but matters proceeded on normal lines until yesterday morning.

Then it became clear that a remarkable development must have occurred during the preceding night, as the

whole of the Dutch workmen and the Turkish attendants were taken off in cabs by the police, not to Morton Street Police Station, but to Scotland Yard, this in itself being a most unusual course to adopt. They are unquestionably detained in custody, but they have not yet been charged before a magistrate.

The police, later in the day, carried off some of these men's personal belongings, from both hotel and mansion.

A sinister aspect was given to the foregoing mysterious proceedings by the presence at Albert Gate, early in the day, of two police surgeons, who were followed, about twelve o'clock, by Dr. Tennyson Coke, the greatest living authority on toxicology.

Dr. Coke and the other medical gentlemen subsequently refused to impart the slightest information as to the reasons that led the police to seek their services, and the Scotland Yard authorities are adamant in the matter.

The representative of a news agency was threatened with arrest for trespass when he endeavoured to gain admission to the Albert Gate house, and it is quite evident that the police are determined to prevent the facts from leaking out at present—if they can by any means accomplish their wishes.

Such is the statement which Mr. Brett, barrister and detective, reads in the morning paper.

He has hardly finished its perusal when the Earl of Fairholme is announced.

He states that he has called regarding the Albert Gate crime. He is engaged, as he explains, to Miss Talbot, the niece of the late Admiral Talbot, at present living with her uncle, General Sir Hubert Fitz-James.

The Sultan, he continues, recently sent over to England some priceless diamonds in the charge of a special envoy. The diamonds being of political importance, the British Foreign Office places the envoy under the care of Mr. Jack Talbot, Miss Talbot's brother. The envoy is lodged in the Albert Gate Mansion, under police surveillance.



One morning the chief of the Turkish mission, his two secretaries, and a confidential servant are found murdered, the diamonds stolen and Mr. Jack Talbot vanished, though the police are on the premises at the time.

The Earl wants Brett to find Jack Talbot.

In conjunction with the Scotland Yard officials Brett commences operations. A search is first made of the Albert Gate Mansion, Mr. Winter the detective, and two inspectors assisting.

Brett discovers that the stones were conveyed out of the house by means of a hole made in the wire screen of one of the windows.

After making further inquiries he departs with Mr. Winter. They separate at the Carlton Hotel, where the supposed assassins resided, Mr. Winter promising to call at Brett's chambers after the inquest on the murdered men has been concluded.

A Startling Clue.

ONCE left to himself, Brett did not enter the hotel. Indeed, he hardly glanced at that palatial structure, having evidently dismissed it from his mind as being in no way connected with the tragedy he was investigating. He made it an invariable rule, in conducting inquiries of this nature, to adopt the French method of "reconstituting" the incidents of a crime, so far as such a course was possible, without the presence of the persons concerned. He reasoned that a very plausible explanation of the unexpected appearance of the three strangers in the Albert Gate mansion on Monday night had been given to Jack Talbot. This young gentleman, it might be taken for granted, had not been selected by the Foreign Office to carry to a successful issue such a delicate matter as that intrusted to him, without some good grounds for the faith in his qualities exhibited by his superiors.

Brett thought he could understand the brother's character from the favourable analysis of his sister, and it was quite reasonable, therefore, to believe that Talbot was a man not likely to be easily duped. The principals in this crime were evidently well aware of the trust reposed in the Assistant Under-Secretary, and they again would not underrate his intelligence. Hence, there was a good cause for Talbot to accept the explanations, whatever they were, given to him during the conclave in the dining-room; the effect of which, in Inspector Sharpe's words, had been to "puzzle" the young Englishman. Further, there must have been a very potent inducement held out, before Talbot would consent to drive off with a stranger at such a late hour, and when the cab was dismissed at the Carlton, the excuse given would certainly be quite feasible.

"It must surely be this," communed Brett. "The man explained that he was a stranger in London; that he lived quite close to the Carlton Hotel; and that he found it convenient not only for the purpose of giving directions that would be understood, but also for paying fares, to direct the drivers of hired vehicles to go there and not to his own exact address, which he had found, by experience, many of them did not recognise, whilst his knowledge of the language was not ample enough to enable him to describe the locality more precisely. It follows, then, in unerring sequence, that Talbot was conveyed to some place within a very short distance of the spot where I now stand."

He looked along Pall Mall, up the Haymarket, and through Cockspur Street, and he noted with some degree of curiosity that there were very few residential buildings in the neighbourhood. Clubs, theatres, big commercial establishments and insurance offices occupied the bulk of all the available space. It was a part of his theory that none of the other

great hotels in this district could harbour the criminals, otherwise there would have been no excuse to stop the hansom outside the Carlton.

Brett did not take long to make up his mind once he had decided upon a definite course. He stood at the corner barely three minutes, and then walked off through Pall Mall and down the steps near the Duke of York's Column into the Horse Guards' Parade, intending to walk quietly to his Victoria Street flat. A call at the Foreign Office procured him an official authorisation from the Under-Secretary to inquire into the circumstances of Talbot's disappearance and a promise that the Home Office should be communicated with. He desired quietly to review the whole of the circumstances attending this strange mystery of modern life, and the result of his reflections quickly became apparent when he reached his residence, for, in the first instance, he dispatched a telegram, and then made several notes in his private diary.

The telegram, in due course, produced an elderly, pensioned police-inspector, a quiet, reserved man, whom the barrister had often employed on inquiries like that which he now confided to him. He explained, briefly, the circumstances attending Mr. Talbot's disappearance, and added:

"I want you to find out the names, and, if possible, the business—together with any other information that you may happen to come across—of every person who lives within a distance, roughly speaking, of two hundred yards from the Carlton Hotel. The Post Office Directory and your own observation will narrow down the inquiry considerably. It is the unrecorded balance of inhabitants with whom I am particularly anxious to become more definitely acquainted." The man saluted and withdrew.

Brett imagined that he would now be left in undisputed enjoyment of a few hours' rest before the Earl of Fairholme kept the appointment fixed for seven o'clock. But in this he was mistaken.

Smith brought in some tea, which was refreshing after his walk, for the engrossing nature of the morning's occupation had caused him to forget his lunch. A cigar and evening paper next claimed his attention, but he had barely settled down to the perusal of a garbled account, given in the news sheet, of events at Albert Gate, when his man again entered, announcing in mysterious tones the presence of Mr. Winter. Smith's attitude towards the myrmidons of Scotland Yard, who occasionally visited the barrister on business, was peculiar. He regarded them with suspicion, tempered by wholesome awe, and he now made known the arrival of the detective in such a manner as caused his master to laugh at him.

"Show him in, Smith," he said cheerily, "he has not come to arrest me this time."

Winter entered, and a glance at that gentleman's face quickly brought Brett to his feet.

"What is the matter?" he cried, when the door had closed behind the servant. "You have evidently received important news."

"I should think I have," replied the detective, dropping into a seat. "I was just writing a report in the Yard when I was sent for by the Chief, and you could have knocked me down with a feather when I heard the reason. I suppose I am acting rightly in coming at once to tell you, although in my flurry at the time I quite forgot to ask the Chief's permission, but as you are mixed up in the case at the request of the Foreign Office, I thought you ought to learn what had happened."

"Well, what is it?" cried Brett, impatient at the other's careful provisos.

"Simply this," said the detective. "Mr. Jack Talbot bolted from London on Tuesday in company with a lady. They crossed over from Dover to Calais by the midday boat and went direct to Paris. Mr. Talbot calmly booked rooms for himself and the girl in the Grand Hotel, had the nerve to write 'Mr. and Mrs. Talbot, 118 Ulster Gardens, London, W.' in the register, and both of them forthwith disappeared. But we will soon lay hands upon the gentleman, no fear. I have somehow suspected, Mr. Brett, that your notion of a political crime was all poppy-cock. It is a good, big, brazen-faced steal."

The Letter.

"Is it?" said Brett, while his face glistened with excitement at the intelligence so suddenly conveyed to him. "Would you mind explaining to me how this precious information has reached you?"

"There is no use, sir, in fighting against facts," said the detective, with dogged insistence. "This time you have been dead wrong. Mr. Talbot was recognised at Calais by a Foreign Office messenger who was returning from France. Seeing him with a lady, and knowing that he was not married, the messenger, Captain Gaultier is his name, did not speak to him, especially as Mr. Talbot seemed rather to avoid recognition. Captain Gaultier thought nothing of the matter until this morning when he visited the Foreign Office on duty and heard something of what had happened. He then saw the Under-Secretary, the gentleman who sent the Earl to you, and told him what had happened.

"The Under-Secretary could hardly refuse to believe such a credible witness, so telegrams were dispatched to the Embassy in Paris and to the police at Dover. From Dover came back the information that exactly such a couple as had been described by Captain Gaultier had crossed over to France on Tuesday morning; and a few hours later a wire from Paris announced the discovery of the registered names at the Grand Hotel. The Paris telegram went on to say that the gentleman had told the manager his luggage was following from the Gare du Nord, and that his wife and himself were going out for half-an-hour, but would return in time to dress for dinner. When his traps arrived they were to be taken to his room. No luggage ever came, nor was either of the pair seen again, but we will lay hands upon them, never fear."

Brett took a hasty stride or two up and down his apartment. "So you think," he burst forth at last, "that Mr. Talbot has not only taken part in some vulgar intrigue with a woman, but that he has also bolted with the Sultan's diamonds, sacrificing his whole career for a momentary impulse and imperilling his neck for the sake of a few gems which he cannot even convert into money?"

"Why not? It is not the first time in the history of the world that a man has made a fool of himself over a woman, or even committed murder in order to steal diamonds."

"Why, my dear Winter," said Brett more calmly, "do be reasonable. Where is the market for diamonds such as these are supposed to be? You know, even better than I do, that the slightest attempt to dispose of them at any figure remotely approaching their value will lead to the immediate detection and arrest of the person rash enough to make the attempt. 'Don't you see, man,' he continued, more vehemently, "that the Foreign Office and its messenger, its Under-Secretary, your Commissioner and the Embassy Officials in Paris have been completely and abjectly fooled—fooled too, in a particularly silly fashion by the needless registration of names at the hotel?"

"No, I do not see it. One cannot go against facts, but this time the evidence looks so strong that I shall be mightily mistaken if Mr. Talbot does not swing for his share in the matter. Anyhow, I have done my duty in letting you know what has happened, so I must be off."

"To arrest somebody, of course?" cried Brett, with an unpleasant laugh; but Mr. Winter was already hurrying down the stairs.

The momentary feeling of annoyance soon passed, to be succeeded by profound pity for the household at 118 Ulster Gardens. He well knew that once the police became convinced that a particular individual was responsible for the commission of a crime it required the eloquence of several counsel and the combined intelligence of a judge and jury at the Old Bailey to force them to change their opinion. Brett had never, to his knowledge, seen Talbot, yet he felt intuitively that this bright, alert and trustworthy young official was innocent of the slightest voluntary complicity in a crime which must shock London when its extent became known.

The testimony of the Foreign Office messenger was, of course, staggering at first sight, especially when it was backed up

by the hurried investigations made at Dover and Paris. But there must be an explanation of Talbot's supposed journey, and, even assuming the most unfavourable view of his actions, why on earth should he so ostentatiously parade himself and his companion at the bureau of the Grand Hotel? There could be but one answer to this question. He acted in this manner in order to make certain that his presence in Paris should be known to the police the very hour they set about the task of tracing him. Then, who could the woman be? The last thing that a clever criminal, flying from outraged law, would dream of doing would be to encumber himself with a young and probably good-looking companion of the opposite sex.

The more Brett thought out the complexities of the affair, the more excited he became, and the longer and more rapid were his strides up and down the length of his spacious sitting-room. This was his only outward sign of agitation. When thinking deeply and fixedly upon any all-absorbing topic, he could not remain still. He felt obliged to cast away physical as well as mental restriction upon the play of his imagination, and he would at times pace backwards and forwards for unrecorded hours in the solitude of his apartments, finally awakening to a sense of his surroundings by reason of sheer exhaustion.

He was not destined to reach this ultimate stage on the present occasion. With a preliminary cough, for the discreet Smith was well versed in his master's peculiarities, that faithful servant announced the appearance of the Earl of Fairholme.

Brett looked at his watch, and was caught in the act by his visitor. "Yes, I know we fixed on seven o'clock," cried the impetuous young peer, "but I was simply dying to hear the result of your inquiries thus far, and I ventured to call an hour earlier."

The barrister explained that he sought to learn the time as a matter of mere curiosity. "Indeed," he added, "your appearance at this juncture is particularly welcome. I want to ask you many things concerning Mr. Talbot."

"Fire away," said Fairholme. "I'm no good at spinning a yarn, but I can answer questions like a prize boy in a Sunday school."

"Well, in the first instance, have you known him many years?"

"We were at school together at Harrow. Then I went into the Army whilst he had a University career. My trustees made me give up the Service when I succeeded to the estates, and about the same time Jack entered the Foreign Office. That is three years ago. We have seen each other constantly since, and, of course, when I became engaged to his sister our friendship became, if anything, stronger."

"Nothing could be more admirably expressed. Do you know anything about his private affairs?"

"Financially, do you mean?"

"Well, yes, to start with."

"He got a salary, I suppose, from Government, but he has a private income of some thousands a year."

"Then he is not likely to be embarrassed for money?"

"Most unlikely. He is a particularly steady chap—full of eagerness to follow a diplomatic career and that sort of thing. Why, he would sooner read a blue-book than the *Pink 'Un*!"

"If you were told that he had bolted with a nondescript young woman, what would you say?"

"Say!" vociferated Fairholme, springing up from the seat into which he had subsided, "I would tell the man who said so that he was a liar!"

"Exactly. Of course you would! Yet here are all kinds of people—Foreign Office officials, policemen, and hangers-on at the British Embassy

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in Paris ready to swear, perhaps to prove, if necessary, that Talbot and some smartly-dressed female went to Paris quite openly by the day service yesterday and even took steps to ostentatiously announce their arrival in the French capital."

For a few moments the two men faced each other in silent wonder, the one at the strangeness of the news he was imparting, the other at its seeming absurdity. Then Fairholme flung himself back into his chair.

"Look here, Mr. Brett," he said, after a moment's thought, "if Jack himself stood there and told me that what you have said is true I would hardly believe it." A note of agony came into his voice, as he added: "Do you know what this will mean

to his sister? Why, man, it will kill her!"

"It will do nothing of the sort," cried Brett. "Surely you understand Miss Talbot better than to hold any such view? She will be the first to proclaim to the world what you and I believe, namely, that her brother is innocent, no matter how black appearances may be. I have no knowledge of him save what I have learnt within the last few hours, yet I stake my reputation on the certainty that he is in no way connected save by compulsion, with this terrible occurrence."

"It gives one renewed courage to hear you speak so confidently," said the Earl, his face lighting with enthusiasm as he looked eagerly at the other, whose earnestness had, for an instant, lifted the veil from his usually calm and impassive features, betraying the strength of character and masterful purpose that lay beneath the outward mask.

"Is there anything else I can tell you?" he added.

Brett reflected deeply before he replied:

"You are quite sure that his was a nature that could not stoop to a vulgar intrigue?" he said. "Remember that in this relation the finest natures are prone to err. From long experience, I have learnt to place such slips in quite another category than mere lapses of criminality."

"Of course any man who knows the world must appreciate your reasons fully," said the other, "but from what I know of Jack I am persuaded the thing is quite impossible. Even if it were otherwise he would never be so mad as to go off when he knew that something very unusual and important was about to occur with reference to a special mission for the successful conclusion of which he had been specially selected by the Foreign Office."

"Ah! there you touch on the strange happenings of coincidence. Circumstantial evidence convicts many offenders, but it has hanged many an innocent man before to-day. I could tell you a very remarkable case in point. Once—"

But Smith appeared to announce dinner, and Brett not only insisted that his new acquaintance should dine heartily, but also contrived to divert him from present anxieties by drawing upon the rich storehouse of his varied experiences.

The meal, therefore, passed pleasantly enough. Both men arranged to visit Sir Hubert Fitz-James that evening and settle upon a definite course of action which would receive the approval of the authorities. Armed with a mandate from the Foreign Office, Brett could enter upon his task without fear of interference from officialdom. Nothing further could be done that night, as the private inquiry agent could not possibly complete any portion of his house-to-house scrutiny in the vicinity of the Carlton until the following morning at the earliest.

They smoked and chatted quietly until 7.30 p.m., when Inspector Winter again put in an appearance, to announce that the coroner's jury had brought in a verdict of "Wilful murder by some two or more persons unknown."

The detective was somewhat quieter in manner now that the sensational turn of events in Paris had assimilated

with the other remarkable features of the crime which engaged his professional attention. Moreover, the presence of a peer of the realm had a subduing influence upon him, and he had the good taste not to insist too strenuously that Lord Fairholme's prospective brother-in-law was not only an accessory to a foul murder, but also a fugitive thief.

One new fact had been established by the post-mortem examination of the victims. Considerable violence had been used to overcome the struggles of the servant, Hussein. His neck was almost dislocated, and there was a large bruise on his back which might have been caused by the knee of an assailant who had endeavoured to garrote him.

They were discussing this discovery and its possible significance when Smith entered, bearing a lady's visiting-card, which he silently handed to his master.

Brett read the name inscribed thereon. He merely said: "Show the lady in," and then he turned to the Earl of Fairholme, electrifying the latter by the words: "Miss Edith Talbot is here."

An instant later Miss Talbot came into the room, and the three men knew that she brought momentous, perchance direful, intelligence. She was deathly pale. Her eyes were unnaturally brilliant, and her mouth was set with tense resolution.

"Mr. Brett," she said, after a single glance at her lover. "we have received a letter from my brother."

"A letter from Jack!" cried Fairholme.

"Well, I never did!" ejaculated Mr. Winter.

But Brett only said:

"Have you brought it with you, Miss Talbot?"

"Yes; it is here. My uncle, who was too ill to accompany me, thought you ought to see it at once," and she handed a torn envelope to him.

He glanced at the post-mark.

"It was posted in Paris last evening," he said, his cool utterance sending a thrill through the listeners. "Is the address written by him?" he added.

"Oh, yes. It is undoubtedly from Jack."

Here was a woman moulded on the same inscrutable lines as the man whom she faced. Seldom, indeed, would either of these betray the feelings which agitated them. Then he took out the folded letter. It contained but three lines, and was undated.

"My dear Uncle and Sister," it ran. "I am in a position of some difficulty, but am quite safe personally.—Ever yours. Jack."

Mr. Winter was the first to recover his equanimity. He could not control the accent of triumph in his voice as he cried:

"What do you think of it now, Mr. Brett?"

But the barrister ignored him, save for a glance which seemed to express philosophical doubt as to whether Mr. Winter's head contained brains or sawdust.

"You are quite positive that both letter and envelope are in your brother's handwriting?" he said.

"Absolutely positive."

"There can be no doubt about it," chimed in Fairholme, to whom, in response to a gesture, Brett had passed the documents.

"Then this letter simplifies matters considerably," said Brett.

Miss Talbot looked at him unflinchingly as she uttered the next question:

"Do you mean that it serves to clear my brother from any suspicion?"

"Most certainly."

"I thank you for your words from the bottom of my heart. Somehow, I knew you would say that. Will you please come and help to explain matters to my uncle? Harry, you will come too, will you not?"

The sweet, gentle voice, with its sad mingling of hope and despair, sounded so pathetic that the impetuous peer had some difficulty in restraining a wild impulse to then and there clasp her to his heart.

Even Mr. Winter was moved not to proclaim his disbelief.

"I will see you in the morning, sir," he muttered. Brett nodded, and the detective went out, saying to himself as he reached the street:

"Nerve! Of course he has nerve. It's in the family. Just look at that girl! Still, it did require some grit to sign his name in the hotel register and then calmly sit down to send off a letter telling his people not to worry about him. I've known a few rum cases in my time, but this one—"

The remainder of Mr. Winter's soliloquy was lost in the spasmodic excitement of boarding a passing omnibus, for this latest item of news must be conveyed to the Yard with all speed.

A Journey to Paris.

THE sight of Talbot's letter seemed to fire Brett's imagination. He radiated electric energy. Both Lord Fairholme and Miss Talbot felt that in his presence all doubts vanished. They realised, without knowing why, that this man of power, this human dynamo, would quickly dispell the clouds which now rendered the outlook so forbidding. For the moment, oblivious of their presence, he began to pace the room in the unconscious concentration of his thoughts. Once he halted in front of the small bust of Edgar Allan Poe, whose pedestal still imprisoned the two cuttings of a newspaper which formed the barrister's first links with the tragedy. His ideas suddenly reverted to the paragraph describing the efforts of the Porte to obtain from the French Government the extradition of a fugitive relative of the Sultan. At that instant, too, a tiny clock on the mantelpiece chimed forth the hour of eight.

"That settles it," said Brett, aloud. "Smith," he vociferated.

And Smith appeared.

"Pack up sufficient belongings for a short trip on the Continent. Don't forget a rug and a great coat. Have the portmanteau on a cab at the door within three minutes.

"I am sorry, Miss Talbot," he continued, with his charming smile and a manner as free from perplexity as if he were announcing a formal visit to his grandmother, "I have just decided to go to Paris at once. The train leaves Victoria at 8.15. Lord Fairholme will take you home, and you will both, I am sure, be able to convince Sir Hubert that to yield too greatly to anxiety just now is to suffer needless pain.

"You are going to Paris, Mr. Brett!" cried Edith. "Why?"

"In obedience to an impulse. I always yield to impulses. They impress me as constituting Nature's telegraphs. I have a favourite theory that we all of us contain a neatly devised adaptation of Marconi's wireless system, and the time may come when the secret will be scientifically laid bare. Then, don't you see, it will be possible for a man in London to ring up a sympathetic soul in San Francisco. At present the code is not understood. It is not even properly named, so people are apt to distrust impulses."

He rattled on so pleasantly that Edith, bound up in the agony of her brother's disappearance and possible disgrace, could not help the expression of blank amazement at his levity which flitted across her mobile features.

Brett instantly became apologetic.

"Do forgive my apparent slippancy, Miss Talbot," he said. "I am really in earnest. I believe that a flying visit to Paris just now must unquestionably advance us an important stage in this inquiry. Let me explain exactly what I mean. Here is a letter from your brother, in handwriting which you and others best qualified to judge declare to be undeniably his. It also bears post-marks which would demonstrate to a court of law that it was posted in Paris last night and received here to-day. But it does not follow that it was written in Paris; it might have been written anywhere. Now, according to the police, there is an entry in the visitors' book at the Grand Hotel which appears to prove that your brother wrote his name therein on Tuesday night. If the handwriting in the Grand Hotel register corresponds beyond all doubt with that in this letter and envelope, then your brother must be in Paris. If it does not, he is not there. I am convinced that

the latter hypothesis is correct, but to make doubly sure I will go and see with my own eyes. There now—I owed you an explanation and I have barely time to catch my train. Good-bye. I will wire you in the morning."

He placed the mysterious letter in his notebook, gave them a parting smile, and was gone.

He just managed to catch the 8.15, which started punctually, the sole remnant of railway virtue possessed by the South Eastern and Chatham line. A restless porter, quickened into active life by a half-crown tip, found him an empty seat in a first-class smoking carriage, and Brett's hasty glance round the compartment revealed that his travelling companions, to Dover, at any rate, were severely respectable Britons bound for the Riviera.

The harbour station at Dover wore its usual aspect of dejected misery. The hurrying passengers pushed and jostled each other in their frenzied efforts to board the steamer, as the average British tourist has a rooted belief that such pushing and jostling and banging of apoplectic portmanteaux against the legs of others are absolutely necessary if he would not be left behind.

With an experience born of many voyages, Brett quickly noted the direction of the wind and the vessel's bearings. A stiff breeze had brought up a moderate sea, and the barrister dumped down his bag, and flung himself into a chair on what a novice would regard as the weatherside of the chart house. He bore his discomfort for a few minutes, and was rewarded for his foresight by possessing the most sequestered nook on deck when the vessel turned her head seawards and began one of the shortest, but perhaps the most disagreeable, voyages in the world.

Having retained his seat long enough to establish a proprietary right therein, Brett rose and took a short tour round the ship. To distinguish anyone on deck was almost out of the question. The passengers were huddled up in indefinable shapes, and there was hardly light sufficient to effect a stumbling progress over the multitude of hand-baggage that seems to be indispensable to most travellers. So the barrister dived down the companion-way and cannoned against a burly individual who had propped himself against a bulkhead on the main deck saloon.

Something hard in the man's pocket gave Brett a sharp rap, and when they separated with mutual apologies, he laughed silently.

"Handcuffs!" he said. "Scotland Yard is always prepared for emergencies. I will wager a considerable sum that as soon as Winter reached headquarters his story about the letter caused a telegram to be dispatched to Dover. Here's a detective bound for Paris and prepared to manacle Talbot the moment he sees him. What a fearful and wonderful thing is the British police system. A crime, obviously clever in its conception and treatment, can be handled by a sharp policeman wearing regulation boots and armed with handcuffs. Really, I must have a drink."

(A further long instalment of this story appears next Tuesday.)

Result of the "Wedding" Post-card Competition.

THE ten Gramophones offered in the above competition have been awarded to the following:

F. Nicholls, 219 Monton Road, Monton Green, nr. Manchester; Thos. Rose, 14 Alfred Road, Sutton, Surrey; Mrs. H. Lay, "C der Idris," Dynevor Road, Grosvenor Wood, Tunbridge Wells; W. Taylor, 5 High Street, Falkirk; R. A. Slipper, Tivetshall Rectory, Norwich; J. Small, 5 Maple Street, Sheerness; G. F. Macro, 17 Summer Hill, St. Luke's, Cork; Miss Jean Lawson, 2 Mentone Gardens, Edinburgh; Geo. Bailey, 281 Cann Hall Road, Leytonstone; W. J. Church, 41 Princes Street, Swansea.



Love Problem No. 2.

A POINT OF VIEW.

Should a Girl Expect to
Begin Married Life as Well
as she has been Accustomed to in her own Home?

MABEL TRAVERS stood at the gate and watched her lover's retreating figure until it disappeared round a bend in the road.

There was a discontented expression on her handsome face as she walked slowly back to the house and entered her mother's drawing-room.

Mrs. Travers looked up from her work as Mabel, with a little impatient sigh, threw herself into a chair.

"Well, dear?" she said brightly.

"Well?" returned Mabel in a tone that implied the contrary.

"Is anything the matter?" asked her mother. "You haven't quarrelled with Leslie, I suppose," she added, playfully.

"No—yes—at least, really I'm not quite sure," was the unexpected reply.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Travers.

"Mother, it's horrible to marry a poor man!"

Mrs. Travers looked at her daughter in pained surprise.

"My darling!" she said, reproachfully.

"Oh, I know I'm a wretch to say it, and—and perhaps I don't mean it—and yet—and yet—"

"Don't be afraid to tell me dear."

"Mother, Leslie and I have been having a business talk. That's what he called it. It was hateful!"

"But very necessary. Leslie was wise, darling."

"Yes—I suppose so. He said that, as we were to be married so soon now, it was only right that I should know exactly what he could offer me. Oh, mother, I had no idea that Leslie was so miserably poor!"

Mrs. Travers eyed her daughter with a troubled look.

"He has never made any secret of his income," she said.

"I know; but I didn't realise how little it was till he went into all the wretched details about rent, and servants, and house-keeping money, and all the rest of it. Oh, it all seemed so mean and sordid!"

And Mabel flung out her hands with a little gesture of impatience.

"I am very sorry to hear you say that, Mabel," said Mrs. Travers gravely. "It—it almost makes me afraid," she went on hesitatingly, "you ought never to have promised to marry Leslie. Perhaps you are not the right kind of wife for him, dear."

"Mother!"

Mrs. Travers rose from her chair and laid her hand lightly on the girl's dark head.

"Tell me, child," she said, "do you really and truly care for him?"

At this Mabel hid her face in her hands and burst into a flood of tears.

"I—I do love him," she sobbed, "but—but—oh, I don't know what is the matter with me!"

And the girl spoke truly. She knew that she loved Leslie, yet she was miserably conscious of disappointment and disillusionment. That day she had realised, for the first time, the prosaic meaning of a limited income. She had been accustomed to think vaguely of poverty as a rather romantic kind of thing that made love all the more delightful. Leslie's statement of hard facts had scattered all her pretty, sentimental notions to the winds. Her heart had sunk within her

as she listened to her lover's description of their future home—a modest villa in the suburbs, with one maid to assist her in her household duties. She dreaded the prospect of all the petty economies they would be obliged to practise, and for a moment, though she hated herself for it the next, she had felt almost angry with Leslie because he was not a richer man. She loved Leslie, she told herself again and again, and yet—

Something of all this the girl contrived to sob out into her mother's sympathetic ear, and as Mrs. Travers listened, the look of perplexity on her face gradually changed to one of relief.

"I think I understand," she said.

"Oh, I'm a horrid, mercenary wretch!" cried Mabel.

"No, I don't think you're that," replied her mother, quietly, "only—well, want of money is never a pleasant thing. We all love wealth and prosperity, and it's perfectly natural that a woman should want her husband to be rich rather than poor. I don't blame you, dear, for regretting Leslie's poverty; only I thought you cared for him less because of it—"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Mabel eagerly. "Mother, you didn't think I meant that!"

"I was afraid, at first, when you spoke so bitterly," replied Mrs. Travers gently. "But I know now I was mistaken."

"Mother, I'm beginning to see things more clearly," said the girl, with a sudden brightening of her face. "I hate poverty, but I love Leslie. If Leslie were a pauper I should groan horribly, but I shouldn't give him up!"

Mrs. Travers began to laugh.

"Well, it isn't as bad as that, is it?" she returned. "After all, Leslie has quite a respectable income. I admit it might be larger, but then, there's every prospect of its increasing as time goes on. Do you know, Mabel," Mrs. Travers continued, "you're just a little bit inclined to exaggerate your future husband's straightened circumstances?"

"Perhaps I am," admitted Mabel. "But then—"

"Oh, I know what is in your mind," interrupted her mother. "Poverty is always comparative, and so, because you have been accustomed to a big house with plenty of servants, a little house with only one servant must seem poor and mean to you."

Mabel looked puzzled.

"You see," said Mrs. Travers, "when you compare the big house with the little one, you're comparing your father's position with Leslie's, and the one, you know, is nearly thirty years older than the other."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mabel, with startling emphasis. "What a silly child I am!"

And Mrs. Travers smiled in a satisfied way. She knew that her daughter was cultivating the proper frame of mind.

"And I never thought of that! I actually expected Leslie to start where father left off! Why, of course, it's unreasonable. Mother, I remember now what you told me once—things have come to you gradually. You and father began just as Leslie and I are going to begin!"

"Well—no, not quite," returned Mrs. Travers.

"But you were almost as poor, weren't you?"

Mrs. Travers laughed gaily.

"If you must know, my dear," she said, "your father's salary when I married him was exactly half the income Leslie is making now."

"Mother," said Mabel, "you make me more and more ashamed of myself."

"Oh, but ours was a dangerous experiment. You see, our income was below the minimum of discretion."

"Anyhow, the experiment ended happily."

"As it happened."

Mrs. Travers blushed charmingly.

"It was a risk, though, which I shouldn't like you and Leslie to run."

"You think I don't love Leslie as much as you loved father, and no wonder, after the way I've behaved," said Mabel humbly. "Mother, I wish—I wish Leslie were as poor as father was, so that I might show you—"

The sentence was elliptical, but Mabel's mother understood.

ONE KISS IN THE DARK.

A Little Story of a Christmas Party.

"WHAT creatures they are—those women! A glance of an eye, a chance touch of a soft little hand, a little ear peering out beneath shining bands of brown hair, a twinkling mouse of a foot in its satin slipper, and it's all over with a man. But, if he just chance to get a kiss in the dark, he's lost for ever—carried off by enchantment!"

"Hush, Paul!" Here spoke the pretty little lady sitting opposite Mr. Dupré, at his own table, Mrs. Dupré by name; and a blush that made her prettier and more piquante than ever crimsoned her somewhat pale cheeks, and even the pearly tips of her ears that just showed themselves beneath "shining bands of brown hair."

"It is true, is it not?" persisted Mr. Dupré, laughing at the pretty threat of that upraised finger. "Here's Benson, almost bursting with curiosity to know how I, Paul Dupré, who six months ago, went to Paris a sworn bachelor and man about town, should have been entrapped, bewitched, inveigled by the arts of an enchantress, and transformed into a sober husband and master of a household. I must tell him, little one, and if you would not listen, you must run away."

With a defiant shake of the little hand, and a pout of the red lips that only made them more tempting, Mrs. Dupré rose from the table. As her husband held the door for her to pass, he said: "It will be told when thou hast prepared for the opera. Adorn thyself, *ma belle*, and in one little half hour return to us magnificent and ravishing."

A wealthy bachelor, of quiet habits, and, unlike the majority of his countrymen, shrinking from society, Paul was quite the last man I had expected to find, on my return from a half-year's sojourn in France, married and settled in a handsome but unostentatious household. Where had he found this beautiful, piquante, dark-haired girl of twenty, who presided so gracefully at his table, and was evidently very much in love with her shy, stately, middle-aged husband?

This was just what he was about to tell me. Paul, having been resident in England since his boyhood, spoke good idiomatic English, with only a slight accent, interspersing his conversation usually, however, with a good many French words. As these are far from being essential to the narrative, we will not record them.

"Tom Dalton—you know Tom?" he began, "spent a month with me a year ago last autumn, at my little place at the North, where I go always for the shooting, and in return he exacted from me a promise that I would go down with him to his father-in-law's house in the country for the Christmas holidays.

"Only a family party," said Tom, and I was foolish enough to take him in a literal sense. I knew Tom's wife, and had

been introduced to that wonderful boy of his who transcends all other children, and I fancied I was to meet just them and the papa and mamma. I thought I might endure that for a few days, especially as Mrs. Tom Dalton is only a pretty statue, and never annoys one with small talk.

"Fancy my astonishment, then, when I found there was a large party—Mrs. Tom's married sister and husband, and her married brothers and their wives, and a host of babies and nurses, and—ah, what was worst of all!—a half score of girls. Think, my friend, of that! Paul Dupré, bachelor and woman-hater, trapped and imprisoned in a country house with at least ten girls with bewildering eyes, and curls, and voices, and hats and dresses, all levelled at me because I was the only single man of the party, excepting always a lad of sixteen who was brother or cousin to every one of them.

"We arrived on Christmas Eve, and as I took Mrs. Rutherford, Mrs. Tom's mamma, in to dinner, and talked politics with the Judge all the evening, I managed to survive the hours pretty well. Next day we all went to church, I still in attendance on Mrs. Rutherford, who was a little old lady, very grand and stately, like the picture of a *marquise* of the old school. Afterwards came a long walk with Tom, then dinner, and I had been twenty-four hours in the house

without speaking to a girl. Of course, there had been a general introduction the previous evening, but, to have saved my life, I could not have told the name of one of them.

"But in the evening we must needs have games for the children, so they said, and blind man's buff among other things. I soon found that I was not able to escape my share of it.

"I give you my word I could not see a particle, except a glimpse straight downward of my chin and the side of my nose. I had been blindfolded carefully by the aid of two or three pairs of hands, and twirled three times round, and set off on my journey by a push.

"Here was a dreadful embarrassment—blind! yes, blinded with a handkerchief—and set to catch somebody—one of those girls, or a married sister or aunt, who could tell? And, oh! fearful task! to tell the name or kiss the one I should catch!

"That was the penalty of being introduced as Tom's friend. 'We are quite a family party,' they said; 'we will not make a stranger of Mr. Dupré.' And so I must be blindfolded and set to catch somebody; and if I could not guess who I had caught—and how could I where all were strangers?—I was to pay the forfeit of a kiss.

"I knew most of the names, but it was quite impossible

that I should identify the individuals to whom they belonged, even with the help of my eyes. How then was I to do it by the touch alone? The kiss was already a foregone conclusion.

"I groped about with little alacrity, and of course caught nobody—just what I had intended. Garments rustled near, and even brushed me as their wearers leisurely moved out of my way. I had only to reach out my hands to catch some of these languid beauties, but I knew very well what must follow, and had not the courage for the feat. If only the children had not been sent to bed, I would have brought that fact to an end very soon! I did not see then how right it was that I had not been drawn into the game while they stayed.

"Presently they seemed to read my thoughts, or perhaps Tom gave them a hint, for they—those girls, I mean—began to inflict intolerable abuse upon me. They pinched my arms, they pulled my hair and my coat, and then—hoysdens that they were—ran away tittering and jeering.

"It was quite time to end this," I said, for I was aroused to retaliation. The catching, and—and what was to follow, should soon be over. Suddenly I began to dart about, and fluttering and musical little screams increased. There was frantic haste, and sundry crashes and collisions that convinced me that the 'play' had become extremely earnest.

"Looking straight downward I could sometimes catch a glance of a stooping figure gliding past me; but presently I lost the power of seeing even so little. I was groping in a narrow passage, for my hands touched the wall on either side, and probably a dark one. Before me I could hear a soft rustle of garments, and a low, hurried breathing. Probably one of my tormentors was hidden there and could not make her escape. If so, the game was nearly ended.

"Pressing forward, as I expected, my hands soon came in contact with the head of a crouching figure drawn closely into a corner.

"I felt smooth strands of hair, a little wreath or bunch of ribbons, a warm, satin-like cheek. The hair might have belonged to any of the younger ladies, with the exception of two or three who wore ringlets, and their cheeks were all round and smooth with health. Of course I could not guess who this was.

"If she would only speak! I knew the voice of Tom's wife, and it might be she. But not a sound issued from her lips; the figure trembled violently and breathed hurriedly, but gave no other sign of life.

"Rise up, mademoiselle," I said at last. "Tell me your name, and then I shall announce it and go away at once." I thought I had hit on a brilliant expedient, and the lady, rising, seemed about to give me the required information, when, with a great shout, three or four persons entered the other end of the passage.

"Mr. Dupré has caught someone!" I heard them say. "Who is it? Tell us whom you have caught!"

"Yes, Paul," shouted Tom; "give us the name, or honestly pay the forfeit."

"Speak," I whispered to the lady whose arm I held; but, trembling, she remained silent.

"Indeed, I cannot tell," I said, and then another great shout rose from rosy lips. I was angry and desperate. I drew the slight figure towards me, I tore the handkerchief from my face, and, bending down, I pressed a resounding kiss upon a pair of lips that pouted with annoyance as their owner struggled to release herself.

"There was another shout, but I was scarcely conscious of it. In my own country I have dark, rare wines which seem to send an electric thrill, as of new and abundant life, through my veins. In effect like this, but a thousand times more intoxicating, was the draught I had just tasted. Elate, triumphant, yet half giddy under the new exhilaration I experienced, I advanced towards the group that thronged the entrance to the drawing-room. I had drawn within my arm the hand of the lady I had caught, and—but no matter. I was recalled to myself by the sound of angry voices, and by feeling the little figure trembling and swaying by my side.

"Go to your room at once, Miss Charter!" old Mrs. Rutherford was saying, while angry exclamations burst from

the lips of the younger ladies—"Astonishing assurance!" "Such impertinence!" "Prowling in the passage on purpose!" all directed apparently to the little creature I was supporting.

"Before I could find words to express my surprise at a scene I was far from comprehending, Miss Charter had quietly withdrawn from my arm. Facing the group that frowned upon her, she spoke with spirit, though with a piteous tremor in her sweet, clear voice.

"Indeed, Mrs. Rutherford, I assure you I had no intention of committing an impertinence. I came down to speak to Mrs. Charles Rutherford about Bella, who is very restless and feverish. While I was endeavouring to attract Mrs. Rutherford's attention this gentleman came out. I moved back, but he followed me up the passage and I could not escape. For what has passed further I am not responsible."

"Indeed, madam, she is not," I found voice to say. "I caught her fairly, and was, of course, unable to name a lady I had never seen. If, however, in my ignorance of your customs I have done wrong, I trust to be pardoned by all present, especially by this lady, who, it seems to me, has been the greatest sufferer."

"No pardon is required by you, Mr. Dupré," replied Mrs. Rutherford coldly; and she added, "Return to your room, Miss Charter; and if you want anything in future, please ring or send Miss Bella's nurse."

"Miss Charter bent her head and turned away in silence. I gave her my hand to lead her to the stairs, but she declined it with thanks, and I heard a low sob as she went wearily up the long flight.

"I beg you will forget the impertinence of that girl!" said Mrs. Dalton, as we all returned to the drawing-room. "She is my sister's nursery governess, and though generally well-behaved, has probably enough of the curiosity of her class to lead her to intrude here. I hope Sarah will dismiss her at once. Nothing is more destructive to household quiet than the slightest insubordination of dependents. Miss Charter must be taught her place."

"But what, then, is her place, madam?" I asked, I fear not very politely, for, with the intoxication of that kiss lingering about me, these remarks jarred painfully upon my feelings. "She surely has the manners and refinement of a lady?"

"No one could expect a lady to make a companion of her nursery-governess, or introduce her as an equal to her friends," said Mrs. Dalton; and her mother, who had been listening, explained further:

"Miss Charter has been well and carefully educated. Her father once held a high position, and her mother was a well-bred and pleasing woman. Their daughter—an orphan and poor, sinks to a lower sphere. It is an undoubted impertinence in her to venture beyond its confines."

"I listened with deference to the ladies, but I was not satisfied. How could I be when all my memories of Miss Charter were so fresh; her gentle young beauty, her spirited, yet ladylike manners, her quiet dignity, and, above all, the kiss that yet thrilled like fire along my veins? I felt the spirit of a champion aroused within me. I had brought this trouble upon the unoffending girl—was I not bound to protect her? Yet I had the tact to see that it were better for me not to plead her cause at present.

"There were no more games after this, the excitement of this scene had destroyed all desire for them. Mrs. Charles Rutherford withdrew to look after her sick child—possibly to scold Miss Charter; the ladies drew into groups, whispering of what had occurred; and the gentlemen went away to slippers and cigars.

"All but myself. I could not pollute the lips that had touched Miss Charter's with the

Turn at once
to page 853
and read a
remarkable
letter.

vile weed. I went to my bed in a delirium, half induced by the ecstasy of my new sensation, half by impotent anger against those I named my persecutors.

"These thoughts pursued me through my dreams, and were with me when I awoke. From my window, in the early morning, I saw Miss Charter with the children in the grounds, and I hastened to join her that I might seek forgiveness for the unintentional wrong I had done her. The presence of the children removed all impropriety from the act, and I thought I should feel more in charity with myself if I assured this young lady that, let her position here be what it would, I felt for her as much as for the highest in the land.

"When I returned to the house half an hour later, I had made a discovery, and that was that I should never be quite happy until I had the right to repeat the kiss I had stolen as often as I chose, and, further, that that was likely to be very often indeed. If Miss Charter had looked very pretty, delicate and refined under the advantageous circumstances attending our first meeting, all these attractions were enhanced by the clear morning air, her own modest self-respect, and the charming embarrassment which the sight of me caused her. I had come down to The Elms priding myself on my confirmed bachelorhood, and contrasting my free, 'unhoused condition' most favourably with that of my friend Tom, who was the slave of the multitudinous fancies of a capricious wife. But all was changed! That kiss had wrought the miracle of revitalising the heart which I thought was dead to all tender emotions. I was as desperately in love—I at thirty-five—as any boy of twenty with his earliest flame.

"I did not see Miss Charter many times at The Elms. My respect for her, her own sense of propriety, alike forbade clandestine meetings. Sometimes she came into the drawing-room to play for the children's dances, when I always showed her marked deference. Once or twice I encountered her abroad. I learnt she had been discharged and was about to go to London. I obtained her address there and pleased myself with the thought of meeting her.

"I was disappointed in this. Only one night she spent with the relative to whose house I had been directed, and then went away to a distant situation which Mrs. Rutherford had procured for her. For a whole year (do you not recall the restlessness that used to excite your mirth?) I wandered about, my soul disquieted with an intense longing to see her once more, to snatch her from a life of toil, to claim her as mine, to make the kiss which was such a delicious memory, a sweet, ever-renewed reality.

"At last, when I had come almost to despair of the realisation of this intense desire, I suddenly and all unexpectedly encountered her one day in a public street. She had returned and was staying with the relation of whom I knew. She met me with a blush and a smile, and a timid pressure of the hand that I interpreted as favourable to my hopes. And she did not deny me the pleasure of meeting her at her house.

"There is not much more to tell. I have told you about the kiss, and its consequences were for me the dearest, sweetest, brightest of pretty little wives; for her a home where she is cherished and beloved, and where I believe my efforts to make her happy have been entirely successful.

"Her only fault consists in the bit of sly malice with which she sometimes insinuates how different the consequences must have been had I chanced to catch and kiss somebody else on that memorable occasion—for instance, one of those black-eyed or flaxen-haired girls, who are now the very dear friends of Mrs. Dupré, once the poor Miss Charter."

L. Parkyn.

LOOK OUT FOR NEXT WEEK'S
COVER.

IT IS THE ERSKINE TARTAN.



Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

December 23.—Those whose birthdays fall here, will have a good year for business and general affairs. Avoid speculations and guard against fires; insure against accident.

Girls will need some care in love matters.

The day is good for doing business with electricians, cloth merchants, and professional people.

A child born to-day will be cheerful, generous, but unsettled and fond of travel.

December 24.—The health will need care during the next year; more than usual opposition in business. Guard against fire, cuts, and falls.

Girls will receive attentions, but little will come of them, chiefly flirtations.

The day is not good, and important matters should be laid aside. Beware of mishap in the evening.

A child born here will be rash and headstrong; will have an unsettled life; should keep in the employ of others. An unhappy marriage if a girl.

December 25.—A Merry Christmas to all, is the wish of "Asturel."

Those celebrating their birthdays to-day will find the next year one of anxiety and worry. Business will require much attention and home affairs will not go smoothly.

Girls born near 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. will experience trouble and disappointment in their love affairs.

A child born this day will be improvident and will do best in the employ of others.

December 26.—A quiet year; have a care with letters and agreements. Better for elderly people, farmers, and landlords.

Young girls will have crosses and obstacles, and must not place much confidence in the opposite sex.

A child born to-day will be thoughtful, ambitious, and persevering. Not fortunate in business.

December 27.—The health will need some attention over the next twelve months; business and general affairs are favoured and some progress will be made.

Girls will find love matters interesting, if engaged they marry.

The day is good for most things; do business with hardware dealers, drapers, literary people, and visit doctors.

A child born here will be active, cheerful, and painstaking. Will have a fortunate life and should succeed.

December 28.—A year of activity and travel; favourable changes can be made. Business and general affairs go well.

Girls should be cautious and prudent in their love affairs; some attentions from married men.

A child born to-day will be unsettled and travel much, but the journeys will generally be fortunate.

December 29.—An unfavourable birthday. Great care will be needed in business, or it will go wrong. Avoid law and quarrels.

Girls will find friction and discord in their love affairs. The day is one on which to keep quiet; beware of mishap and quarrels. Guard against loss.

A child born here will be best in the employ of others. The mind will be rash, and stubborn.

• Asturel.



HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

LORD REGINALD DAVENANT. Another of Belinda's suitors.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who visits Cairo.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.



HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

WHILE staying at the Continental Hotel at Cairo, I lose my fortune by the failure of Hammond's Bank. I undertake, therefore, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, the daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire, and to bring about her marriage with the son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres, and his mother the Duchess.

The Duchess and I agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; we do everything, therefore, to bring this about.

One evening, under the guidance of a fine-looking Bedouin, we all go to witness a religious festival. Some dervishes are dancing, when suddenly Belinda, excited beyond all self-restraint, throws herself into the midst of the fanatics and tries to imitate their weird dance. Instantly all is confusion. The guide snatches Belinda and hurries us away. Belinda is profuse in her thanks, and suddenly, with a cry of "Lady Peggy, he's not a dragoman at all, he's David Carr!" throws herself into his arms.

The dragoman is dismissed, and on our return to the Hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes me to task for the occurrence. I retort that not long ago I saw the Duchess' own daughter, Honoria, in the arms of a real Egyptian!

The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and, after storming at her, slaps her face. Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room.

Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help!" The voice is Belinda's!

Rushing upstairs, I discover that Belinda has only just prevented Honoria poisoning herself to escape marriage with her cousin, Mark Striven. Later in the day we go to the Pyramids.

Lord Reginald Davenant, a new arrival at Cairo, accompanying the party, at one time in love with Mrs. Murchison-Lee, now transfers his affections to Belinda. The slighted Mrs. Lee, or "Midge," as she is called, is furious, and threatens violence to Belinda.

I backmate Midge, however, by abstracting the morphia (to which she is a slave), with the hypodermic syringe, from her dressing-case.

That same evening I suddenly discover the Duke of Eastacres and a new-comer, Stanley Forbes, in the midst of a violent

altercation. Fearing that a duel may ensue, I rush between the two men.

Sending Eastacres off on some errand, I tax Stanley Forbes with quarrelling with the Duke in regard to a girl named Sheila Kenwyn. She had disappeared some time back; it is thought the Duke is responsible for her disappearance. An open scandal about Eastacres would interfere with my matrimonial projects.

"Forgo a quarrel with the Duke," I implore Stanley, "and I will extract Sheila's address from him."

Stanley consents. With some diplomacy I entrap the Duke into telling me where the girl is.

Next morning I start Belinda and the Duke off to Cairo, and tackle Stanley Forbes successfully in their absence. Later, I return to the Continental and find my labours rewarded. I behold Belinda clasped in the Duke's arms!

On offering my congratulations, however, Belinda repudiates all notion of an engagement with the Duke. She explains that her attitude is one merely of liking for him, and that when in token of friendship she gave her hand to her lover, she found herself embraced.

"I made Miss North a proposal of marriage," says the Duke. "She did not answer me in words, but put her hand in mine. Am I to be blamed if I misread her meaning?"

I assure the Duke that his conduct has been quite natural, entirely blameless, and represent to Belinda that, after her behaviour, marriage with the Duke is inevitable, as I was not the only one who saw the Duke's embrace, and that unless her engagement to Eastacres is announced she will be looked upon as an immodest girl.

Belinda still refuses to regard herself as engaged, however, and as a last resource I threaten to send her back to her father. She consents under great pressure to an engagement in name only for a month. At the end of that time, when we shall be leaving Cairo, I promise to announce that the engagement has been broken off.

Close on her consent the door opens, David Carr enters, just sixty seconds late.

My influence had obtained an appointment for him at St. Petersburg, and he had come to say good-bye. The Duke lays his hand upon Belinda's arm, and, remarks calmly, "We are just engaged."

"It is a lie!" cries David, and appeals to Belinda.

Then, for the first and only time while she is with me, Belinda faints. I turn the two men out of the room and get Belinda to bed. She asks for Honoria. That ungrateful girl takes a base advantage of my kindness and brings David Carr a message from my *protégée*.

"Belinda says she won't be married for a year, at least," announces Honoria. "Will you please come to her wedding?"

David, greatly comforted at the words, departs.

Our stay in Cairo now draws to a close, the Khedive's ball ending the season. I determine on that occasion to make a public announcement of Belinda's engagement to the Duke.

One night I discover that Belinda's pearls are missing. I go to the Duchess to consult her as to the best means of recovering them. Looking through the door of her room, I discover her Grace in the middle of the room, one hand raised in a threatening attitude towards her daughter, in the other lay Belinda's pearls! The Duchess explains to Honoria that Belinda gave her the pearls to take care of. Honoria retires to her own room and the Duchess proceeds to empty the contents of a trunk upon the floor. It contains all sorts of knick-knacks; amongst them I recognise a valuable fan of mine. The truth suddenly dawns on me. The Duchess is a kleptomaniac! I obtain the pearls from her Grace, on the plea that Belinda told me she was keeping them for her, but she will not give up my fan.

On the night of the Khedive's ball, Belinda publicly declares she is not engaged to Eastacres. The latter follows her to a side room to remonstrate. I am about to join them, when the Khedive enters into conversation with me.

From where I stand I see that Eastacres and Belinda are quarrelling. Suddenly through a door on the Duke's right a veiled woman appears. At sight of Eastacres she screams.

It is Honoria, who is about to elope with El Hamed, her Egyptian lover.

The Duke darts forward to stop her, but, with Belinda's help, she evades him, and makes for the river, by which means El Hamed had arranged for her to get away from Cairo, he meeting her some few miles lower down.

Late though it is, the Duke insists that I shall accompany him to search for his sister. We arrive at the quay, and suddenly see Honoria on board a small launch which is just steaming away.

Our cries to the captain to stop, and Honoria's frantic appeals to him to go forward, convince the captain that something is wrong, and he returns, and finally hands his charge over to Eastacres.

I now leave Cairo with Belinda for Paris, on a visit to my old friend the Marquise D'Arteuil and her nephew the Comte de Sonnaz. Determining to drop Eastacres, I decide that the Comte shall be the next on the list of Belinda's suitors. Arrived at Paris, however, I am dismayed to find that Eastacres is already there to welcome me.

This Week's Instalment.

BELINDA BECOMES THE RAGE IN PARIS.

To find that Eastacres was a guest of the Marquise caused me almost as much annoyance as Belinda. His presence, I thought, was likely to interfere with my plans in regard to Belinda and the Comte; rejected himself, he would not tolerate a more favoured suitor.

Belinda showed her displeasure more plainly than she should have done. She accorded the Duke the chilliest of greetings, and made a marked difference in her treatment of him and the Comte.

The Marquise d'Auteuil explained that Eastacres had called on her an hour or two before we arrived.

"He found himself desolated to leave me," she said, with an expressive gesture, "What could I do but ask him to remain?"

"What, indeed?" I murmured, marvelling that at her age, and with her experience she should be so inordinately vain as to swallow the Duke's outrageous flattery.

The Hotel D'Auteuil stands in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and is one of the most splendid of the many man-

sions of fashionable Paris. It is one of those grand foreign houses at which all great people meet. A sort of neutral ground in which political differences are obliterated, and, all that is well-born or well-dowered with money or brains received.

The house is grand, gorgeous, brilliant, adorned in the taste of the second Empire, to which it belonged; glittering and overlaid, superb, yet at times too showy. The vestibule of marble, lit by gilded gasaliers, is filled with masses of camelias and azaleas, beautiful and scentless; the wide staircase is bright with scarlet carpeting, into which the feet sink as though treading upon velvet, mirrors line the walls, and heavy odours of burnt pastilles fill the heated air.

Belinda achieved as great a success in critical Paris as she had done in cosmopolitan Cairo. Her beauty, her girlishness, her curious disregard and contempt for the remarks of Society, charmed the Parisians, always on the *qui vive* for something new and startling.

The Comte, as I had foreseen, fell desperately in love, while Belinda showed a decided liking for the young Frenchman.

I sounded her on the question of marriage with him, but, as usual, she was disappointing.

"I like him," she said frankly, "but as a friend, no more. I told him so the first evening that we came here. You see," she added, noting my look of dismay and astonishment, "I did not want him to make a mistake like the Duke. I said I should be pleased to have him for a friend, but I explained that David Carr was the only man I wished to marry. The Comte seemed a little surprised at first, but after he understood why I had told him, and was very nice. So you see," Belinda flashed a smile, "there's no reason why I shouldn't talk and laugh, and ride, and drive with him. He won't misunderstand now."

Belinda had decidedly used her experience with Eastacres to some purpose! I felt she had outwitted me, and when that evening I spoke to the Comte himself, he gave me little consolation.

"She is beautiful!" he exclaimed, "she is *chic, ravissante, adorable*. But she is not for me. She has said so herself. We are *bon camarades*, Lady Peggy, no more."

"You are easily discouraged," I said, smiling, "since when were you faint-hearted? A rival should fire your enthusiasm, not damp it."

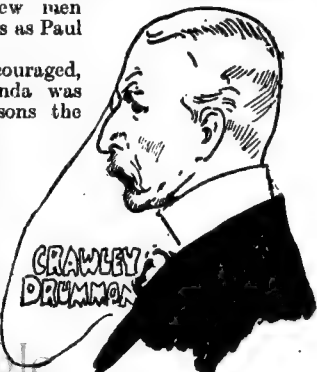
De Sonnaz paused; then, with a half laugh, and a faint flush, bent towards me.

"She has told me of her lover," he said softly, "and, as she spoke, her eyes—those beautiful blue eyes—looked me through and through. They appealed to me, asking me to help her, to act with honour to her, and that most fortunate of men, M. Carr. Had she delayed, had she waited but another day, it would have been too late. I could not have given her my friendship, I could only have offered her my heart. But, as it is"—he looked me straight in the eyes—"I am her friend," he added softly, "and—M. Carr's."

What he said gave me cause for great uneasiness. Belinda, by a clever trick, had disarmed the Comte as a lover, and transformed him from a suitor to a friend. She might pursue the same tactics in regard to other men with similar results! Only, thank goodness, few men were as foolishly chivalrous as Paul de Sonnaz.

Still, the incident discouraged, almost alarmed me. Belinda was learning some of the lessons the world has to teach with remarkable aptitude. She was fighting me with one at least of my own weapons, finesse masquerading as candour.

My eyes involuntarily sought the Duke's. He was, as usual, close to Belinda. All her efforts and manœuvres could not dislodge him from the place





that he had chosen—at her right hand. At every function, dance, "At Home," water or theatre party, he was there. And against his persistency, well-bred but determined, even Belinda's will was powerless. As a consequence, the story of their engagement and its rupture was recounted, discussed, and commented upon, in every salon in Paris, the general verdict being that a "misunderstanding had arisen, which would eventually be put right."

Hardy North shared this opinion, and wrote to that effect with great earnestness and some

severity to Belinda for the steps she had taken.

The Duke's eyes met mine over the girl's fair head. He seemed to read what was passing in my mind. He strolled over to where I sat, dropping into the vacant chair beside me. "Tired?" he said softly, "or worried, which is it, Lady Peggy? The Comte is not playing the part assigned him to your satisfaction, perhaps? It is your own fault. I told you the rôle was mine. Sooner or later Belinda will accept me as her fate, and of her own free will."

I shook my head.

"She will never willingly marry except for love," I answered.

"Or hate," he returned, "either is sufficient. She does not care for me, truly, but neither does she for any other man—the engineer fellow is not worth considering."

"She may care, though," I returned maliciously, "she is very young and very beautiful, and half Paris is at her feet. She would be more or less than woman to withstand such homage." I motioned to where Belinda stood, a tall, girlish figure in white cachemire, an old silver girdle of German work about her waist, and in the coils of her bright hair a single silver arrow.

The Marquise was holding a reception; her rooms, as usual, were thronged, and Belinda was surrounded by admirers.

The girl was looking her best. Strikingly unlike the charming *mondaines* that graced the hotel, she had a style and distinction all her own. Her fair face was guiltless of paint and powder, her hair took its gold from Nature, and her figure, straight and slim as a sapling, owed nothing to artificial compression.

In the midst of the brilliance, the luxury, the glittering lustre, the *va et vient* of the Hotel D'Arteuil she stood calm and serene, like a white statue against a bank of flaming crimson flowers.

At the moment that I called the Duke's attention to the girl, Alphonse Hervé, the French painter, was bowing over her hand. Young, rich, famous, with the genius of a Raphael, and the face of Saint Sebastian, Paris went mad over him.

Great ladies competed for his notice, he was the lover of the rulers of Society, the hero for a hundred intrigues and romances—and he had fallen a victim to the grave blue eyes of a girl in her teens. He was bewitched by Belinda!

Her face coloured under his ardent gaze, but his manner, almost reverential, reassured her. Gradually the group of men surrounding her melted away. She had ears for none but the famous Hervé.

A certain Grand Duchess, an imperious woman who fancied that she reigned over Hervé's life, because he dominated hers like a fatality, watched Belinda with an anger hardly to be restrained. A lovely creature, exquisitely painted, she wore a gown cut *en cœur*, fashionably indecent, and sparkling with gems. She was a triumph of art, the highest product of our world. Belinda was crude beside her, and yet, so blind are men, that Hervé never cast a look in her direction.

Belinda appeared equally impressed, as I noted with alarm. Hervé was a genius truly, but a commoner, and, therefore,

no match for Hardy North's millions. The Duke, to my relief, interrupted the *tête-à-tête*.

Belinda received him coldly, and pointedly ignored his effort to draw her into conversation.

"I wish to speak to Lady Carstairs," she said calmly, "Will you take me to her, M. Hervé?"

The Frenchman bowed, offered his arm, and piloted her safely towards me.

"M. Hervé is painting a wonderful picture, Lady Peggy," she said in her fresh young voice, "but he is not pleased with his model. He wants me to sit to him instead. I hope you will not object, because M. Hervé has promised that if I will sit for this picture he will sketch my head and face for father. You know how that would please him."

"If that is your only reason for acting as model, Miss North," said the Duke, who had quickly followed her across the room, "the matter can easily be arranged otherwise. I will commission Hervé to paint your portrait at his own price, and, with your permission I will send it to your father." The Duke gazed at the painter with the cool insolence of which he was master. Hervé flashed and bit his lip. For a moment I feared he would answer in terms as provocative, but with an effort he controlled himself.

"I cannot accept your commission," he said coldly.

"Nor my father your gift," flashed Belinda, danger in her eyes. Then, turning to Hervé she said sweetly, "It will give me great pleasure to sit for you, monsieur. Lady Peggy, do you object?"

This painfully direct method of attack discomposed me. It was difficult to return an ambiguous answer to such a horribly open question.

"My dear Belinda, I am delighted that M. Hervé should pay you so great a compliment," I said, smiling. "You are to be envied."

"When may I sit to him?" said the terrible girl.

"That is for me to decide with M. Hervé," I said quietly.

"The Marquise is looking for you, Belinda," I added. "East-a-ces," I turned to the Duke, "will you take Miss North to Madame D'Arteuil?"

With a very bad grace my charge accepted the Duke's arm. Our hostess, a fairlike little person with a wonderful wig, and a marvellous complexion, both Piver's latest, received her with a smile. She had an admiration for the girl's beauty, and a liking for her courage.

"When may I hope to see you at my studio, Lady Peggy?" said Hervé softly. "It is an eternity since you came. I remember you brought your daughter, Lady Millicent—how long is it—five years ago? She was lovely, your daughter, fair and slight, with eyes dark as night, and soft as your own."

"Belinda's are blue," I said, smiling.

"Oh, yes, the day follows the night! Both are beautiful."

He gazed at me meaningly. Somehow I did not care to meet his look. Millicent had nourished an infatuation for him at a time when he was but beginning his career. I had nipped the attachment in the bud, but it would seem he still remembered her.

"You will let me paint this beautiful young girl?" He bent over my hand, his eyes flashed into mine. I reflected that to be painted by the great Hervé would immensely enhance Belinda's reputation as a beauty. I would accord the artist no opportunity for making love to his model. Besides, Belinda—

"I will bring her to the Rue Royale to-morrow," I said, and Hervé thanked me with a brilliant smile.

The Comte de Sonnaz drew me aside as I passed down the room.

"Why don't you give the Duke his *congé*, Lady Peggy?" he asked moodily. "Belinda has an acute distaste for him, he troubles, indeed, almost frightens her, with his attentions. Can't you make him understand they are unwelcome?"

"Paul de Sonnaz, are you mad?" I cried indignantly. "Do you ask me to insult a guest in your aunt's house?"

"Belinda also is a guest," he returned shortly. "The Duke is annoying her. If you won't stop him, why," he laughed, "I must. It is the duty of one friend to help another."

"Paul," I laid my hand on his arm, "for Heaven's sake, think of the Marquise! You are so hot, so hasty, you will insult the Duke, he will retaliate, and then—" I paused and glanced at him significantly.

"Have no fear for me or your dear Duke. We shall not fight, I promise you that. I shall remonstrate with my tongue only. Now for Alphonse," he glanced after the painter, "there is cause to be alarmed. Alphonse is already the rival of Eastacres. And"—he glanced at me shrewdly—"it is possible he may prove more fortunate than even his Grace or I."

"Impossible! Belinda would not reject Eastacres for a painter!"

"My dear lady, but what a painter! And what a man! And how superb a lover! Where else is to be found genius and beauty, and fascination such as Alphonse Hervé's? Have a care, Lady Peggy, or you may plunge Paris into mourning. The Duke is a dead shot, and Hervé—"

"My dear Paul, do not be melodramatic. English Dukes do not fight duels with artists."

"Unless they are challenged," he interrupted. "Eastacres will provoke a challenge unless you are careful."

I laughed at his earnestness, and asked what he wished me to do.

"Tell the Duke you no longer permit his addresses to Miss North. You do not wish him to marry her?"

"He is an excellent match," I answered.

For answer Paul de Sonnaz sneered—sneered in my face.

"An excellent match!" he repeated. "For how many sins do a title and a settlement atone to you women? I'm not a feeling fellow, Lady Peggy, not a particularly moral one, but there are some things I can't stand. To speak of marriage between Belinda and the Duke is desecration."

"What do you know of Eastacres?" I asked hurriedly, my mind reverting to *l'affaire Sheila*.

"Only what all Paris and all London knows, that is quite enough."

I felt relieved, and smiled at him serenely.

"Paris knows much about us all, *mon cher*," I whispered, "so long as it doesn't tell, what does it matter? The Duke is no better and no worse than other men. Come, you are jealous, that is all."

He made no answer, but left me with a formal bow. His hints anent the painter's possible fascination for Belinda disturbed me much more than his diatribes against the Duke. Hervé, as I had cause to know, was a dangerously charming man. Belinda, with that obstinacy peculiar to herself, was quite likely to fall a victim to that charm, if for no other reason than to oppose me.

I regretted my promise to call at the Rue Royale the next day, and decided it should be our first and only visit. One sitting, I reflected, could do no harm. I would not leave Belinda for an instant.

The next day was a memorable one. Paris was keeping holiday, a *fête des fleurs* drew everybody to the Bois. There was to be at half-past three that afternoon a procession of carriages—equipments of all kinds—decked with the favourite flowers of their fair owners. There was considerable rivalry among the great Parisian ladies in the matter of this procession. Thousands of francs were lavished on the purchase of violets, lilies, orchids—the blooms of a day—in which to smother their carriages and coachmen.

Belinda was excited at the prospect of seeing the procession. We were to drive with the Marquise in a landau decorated with carnations, pink, and red, and white.

Our gowns were designed in harmony with the colours—Belinda in a rose-coloured cloth, with finely chased silver and turquoise buttons, looked most distinguished.

We arrived at Hervé's studio a little after two. It was a magnificent apartment, the floor of stained oak was covered with leopard and tiger skins, seductive looking divans were stretched against the walls, masses of hot-house flowers filled the air with sweetness, works of art of priceless value ranged themselves before you. Statues, gorgeous tapestries silver and gold flagons that had graced the hall of some

mediaeval baron, sketches signed by names of European repute, Venetian mirrors in curiously wrought metal frames. Everywhere luxury, elegance, ease.

Hervé at work in his studio was a silent, almost stern man. Quite different from the Prince Charming of the Paris salons. His face was tense as he stood before his easel, his eyes large, brown, limpid, grew luminous as with swift, masterly strokes, he reproduced Belinda's face on canvas. As for soft speeches or tender looks, they did not exist for him that afternoon. He was possessed by the demon of work, and save for a few short sharp directions to his model, hardly spoke.

Belinda made no demur, but submitted to his orders obedient and willing as a child.

Just after three Paul de Sonnaz made his appearance.

He declared Hervé must throw down his brushes on the instant, and insisting on our all adjourning to the front of the house, as there was something "outside" likely to surprise us. Immediately before the house, the centre of an admiring crowd, was Paul's dogcart, drawn by a mare, by name Kitty, a beautiful, high-spirited creature, capricious and wilful as Belinda herself. The dogcart was a mass of roses, rich red, damask, delicate pale pink, soft, velvety white. I have never seen anything more tasteful or more lavish. The cart was a moving bouquet. Kitty, with a bunch of roses coquettishly stuck in her mane, looked wicked but handsome.

"I'm glad you like it," said Paul, delighted at Belinda's enthusiasm. "It was Hervé's idea, he and I discussed it this morning. You've no objection to my driving Miss North, Lady Peggy? I'll take good care of her."

A few minutes later they had driven off. Hervé following on his bay, while I returned to the Hotel D'Auteuil to join the Marquise.

It was a perfect day, a day of brilliant sunshine in which Paris looked her best. In the best of spirits we drove to the Bois and joined the procession. The dogcart was immediately in front of our landau. Belinda caused a sensation from the moment she joined the long line of carriages which moved slowly up and down the Avenue, two on each side of the row of gendarmes, going in contrary directions.

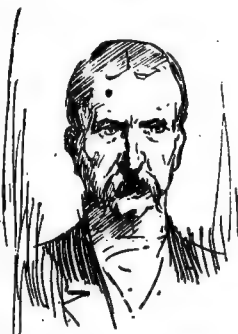
The beauty of the girl, her exquisite rose costume, the handsome cart, more artistically decked than any of the others, exhaling the costly odour of hundreds of drooping roses, aroused the utmost enthusiasm from the carriages nearest to theirs, and from the thousands of spectators who lined the footpaths. Some of the people climbed on chairs, and commented audibly upon her beauty, others crowded forward, and a perfect fusillade of flowers, lilies and violets, carnations and almond blossoms fell upon her.

Leaving the Bois we turned in the direction of the Hotel D'Auteuil, the dogcart preceding the landau. Crossing the Rue de la Concorde, Belinda dropped a rose, instantly Paul de Sonnaz was on his feet, he jumped to the ground, and, stooping, picked up the blossom. Belinda had taken the reins as they fell from Paul, and the mare, immediately realising that a slighter hand controlled her, grew restive, not to say skittish, threw up her head and fairly bolted.

Paul rushed after the cart, the landau of the Marquise followed suit. We strained our eyes to follow Belinda's slender, girlish figure seated erect, grasping the reins steadily, firmly.

"If she keeps cool she'll master the mare yet," gasped Paul, as he swung on to the landau. "She knows how to drive, and Kitty hasn't a bit of vice in her."

All the same we shouted to our coachman to urge his horses to the utmost speed. We rushed along at a frantic rate, but still the cart forged well ahead, the rose-coloured figure of Belinda



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

YOUR EDITOR CHATS.

swaying with the motion. As she neared the Pont de la Concorde the mare lowered her head, and, swerving to one side, dashed down the Quai D'Orsay.

Gradually Belinda was getting the mastery of her, when, as they turned the corner, a steam-tram gave vent to an unearthly screech. The mare reared, plunged and reared again, nearly falling backwards. Belinda cut her smartly with the whip, but, with a movement of the head, she got the bit between her teeth, and bolted for all she was worth.

At that moment there flashed past us a man on a tall grey horse.

"Thank God!" cried Paul, "it's Hervé. She'll be saved! Alphonse will overtake her."

Suddenly, his white face working with emotion, Paul pointed to where, at the end of the street down which the dogcart was flying, a monster steam-roller was crushing the stones used to pave the road. The gendarme regulating the traffic obliged all vehicles to pass in single file. Another two or three seconds and the dogcart would near the stream of waiting traffic—would crash into the nearest carriage, and then!

It seemed as if nothing could arrest the catastrophe. Already in imagination I saw the cart dashed to pieces, Belinda's form outstretched upon the ground. And then, just as all hope was over, Hervé by a frantic effort brought the grey level with the dogcart. Rising in his stirrups he clutched the mare as she dashed past and hung with all his strength and the risk of his life, on to her bridle. The mare thus checked paused in her headlong career—the bystanders rushed to give assistance. The crisis was over. Belinda was saved.

"I owe my life to you, Monsieur," she said, giving her hand to Hervé, as they stood upon the footpath. "You risked yours for me. So great so wonderful a life for mine."

Her eyes glistened, her face was flushed, she trembled. He was a great artist, a perfect lover, and the handsomest man in Paris—and he had lost his heart to this young girl! I wondered, would she give him hers, or would she still keep faith with David, the far distant engineer.

Belinda's narrow escape was but the first of a chain of startling incidents in which Hervé played a prominent part. From that day he was Belinda's shadow, as persistent as patient a shadow as the Duke himself.

On one occasion he invited us to luncheon in his grounds. It was to be an *al fresco* entertainment, and the Barrone de Choiseul insisted that the woman should go dressed in peasant costume, with bare feet, short skirts and high white caps *à la Normandie*. It was a picturesque scene. In one part of the grounds there were wooden booths such as are erected in Paris during Carnival time, fitted with dainty trifles in the way of sweetmeats, bric-a-brac and jewellery.

Belinda sold gold-tipped cigarettes for roses. She was smothered with blossoms, and her stall was cleared in twenty minutes. Such a *fête* could only take place in Paris. To attempt a similar entertainment in London would be to court failure, not to say ridicule.

Events had moved very quickly since we came to Paris. Of Hervé's infatuation there could be no doubt, what puzzled me was whether or no Belinda returned it. Until I was sure of that I judged it better not to interfere.

Hervé was idolised by most women—no one yet had resisted his charm. It remained to be seen whether or no Belinda would prove an exception to her sex.

The proof came unexpectedly. One evening after we had returned from a dull play at the Théâtre Français, Belinda rushed into the salon. The Marquise turned, a slightly vexed expression on her face.

"My dear, what is the matter?" she inquired.

Belinda, without pausing to reply, came up to me.

"Quick, quick, Lady Peggy," she cried. "There's no time to lose. You must come at once. The Duke and Hervé are about to fight—to fight, I tell you, in the studio. Alphonse can't shoot a bit. And, and"—she paused—"what shall I do?" she gasped. "What can I do? The Duke will kill him, and—I cannot bear it!"

(A further splendid instalment appears next Tuesday.)

LAST week I promised that I would tell you the true story of the way in which one of the tales in the Christmas Number came to be written, and of the manner in which payment for it kept a home together.

The tale was entitled "The Story of Esther," and the *nom de plume* of the writer was "Orme Lewis." The circumstances are as follows:

Among the manuscripts which I was reading one night a few weeks ago I came across one on very soiled paper and written with obviously watered ink. It was a pathetic story, altogether too melancholy for use in a bright little paper like *Short Stories*, but I was struck with the depth of emotion expressed in the story, which, in simple language, told of the struggles of a wife to keep a home together while her husband was stricken down with a lingering illness. It seemed as though the writer of the story had actually experienced those feelings of absolute despair that were expressed by the chief character in the narrative, and I put the story aside. The next day I wrote a letter to the author expressing my regret that I was unable to make use of that particular story, but saying that I should not only like to see another story of a more cheerful description, but that I should be willing to give some advice if the writer cared to call. The writer did not call, but promised to send another story within a few days. The manuscript arrived, and was entitled "The Story of Esther." After reading it I at once accepted it and sent a cheque in payment. A few days later I received the following letter:

DEAR SIR,

I enclose a formal receipt for the cheque which you sent me in payment for my manuscript, "The Story of Esther." I don't mind telling you now something that I would not tell you before, lest you should be influenced in my favour in your decision regarding the story.

Three months ago my husband was taken seriously ill, and remained in bed for nearly four weeks. After that the doctor said that it was absolutely necessary that he should go away for a change of air to the south coast or he would be certain to have a relapse. He had to go, but as we had only a few pounds in the bank, our funds were soon exhausted. The firm at which my husband was employed refused to pay him any money while he was ill, and, of course, there was nothing coming into the house. At the end of a month my husband came home, and the shock of finding that I had been obliged to sell a lot of our household effects in order to help to pay for his change of air so unnerved him that he again became prostrate. I got some needlework to do, and with the few shillings I received I managed to keep the little home together, but I had to run into debt.

Last Christmas we had a happy time, for my husband was then earning £4 a week, and my little boy was in the best of health. The outlook for this Christmas was indeed desolate—my husband was earning no money, my little boy had grown thin and pale owing to want of nourishing food, and we were in debt.

One day I received a letter from our landlord which said that unless his rent were paid up-to-date he would have to put in the brokers. That night, while my husband and little boy had fallen asleep, I sat at a table and wrote down on paper the whole story of our struggles. It did me good to open my heart, and when I had finished I crept into bed and cried myself to sleep. The next morning I found the manuscript, and a thought flashed through my mind that I might be able to sell it, and I sent it on to you. Well, you know the result.

Although it was not accepted, you asked me to write another, which I did with a light heart; and the cheque which I received not only paid the landlord what was owing to him, but enabled me to get good food for my husband. I am now going to write more stories, which I hope you will accept. But I am too proud to live on charity, and I am sure that your decision with regard to my stories will not be in any way influenced by what I have told you.

Yours very gratefully,

ORME LEWIS.

You will perhaps wonder why I think fit to tell you a story of this sort. My reason for doing so is to let you know that all the stories you read, however bright they may be, are not written under such comfortable circumstances as you would imagine.

After reading this, I am sure that you will feel additional interest in the tales which appear in *Short Stories*, especially those to which the name "Orme Lewis" is appended.

Your Editor.

MIDNIGHT was booming slowly out from the clock over the stables at Hamdon Hall, when a figure stole out of the side gate of the park and turned into the lane skirting its western side. The figure was that of a woman wrapped from head to foot in a long cloak, which effectively concealed her form, but did not hide a stoop which might have been caused by age. Keeping close under the hedge she glided swiftly in the direction of the churchyard that lay a quarter of a mile or so along the lane. A pale moon shone fitfully through the clouds, and wavering shadows fell across the low-lying meadows beyond the churchyard and made strange shapes of the gravestones within its borders. Round the lych-gate the shadows lay deepest, and here the hurrying figure paused to look right and left with anxious glances, peering oftenest of all into the darkness made by the lych-gate itself.

"Are you there?" The words were breathed at last in trembling accents. "Are you there, Hal? Come out, dear, it's safe, and I—I've got what you wanted."

The voice sank to a whisper, but that whisper had been heard. From the place of deepest shadow, a man's form stepped quickly, and crossed the road to where that other figure waited under the hedge.

"How much?" he asked roughly, in a hoarse undertone.

"I—I'm not sure; I think it's fifty," said the trembling woman's voice, and a hand was outstretched from the enveloping cloak, holding out to the man a packet, which he eagerly seized.

"Fifty?" There was a note of dissatisfaction in his tone. "Well—it can't be helped. Wouldn't he give more?"

"He—he—Oh, Hal, I *could* not ask him," the woman's voice faltered and broke. "I—he does not know—I mean—I have got it for you, and indeed it is all I can get. I—"

Her words ended in a choking sob; she drew nearer to the man, laying a trembling hand upon his arm.

"Oh, all right, it must do—there, there, don't cry, that's a dear soul. I can't stand tears. Kiss me, and let me be off; I must be some way from here by daybreak. I've expected you since ten o'clock."

"I know, dear, I know, but I could not get away; and O, Hal, promise me, promise that now you will begin afresh—will turn over a—"

"For Heaven's sake don't preach, and don't cry either," he added hastily, as she uttered another choking sob. "Good-bye, and cheer up. Perhaps I'm not so black as they paint me?" Stooping, he kissed the white face uplifted to his in the moonlight, and before she could utter another syllable, he had turned away and plunged once more into the shadows of the churchyard.

The woman walked slowly back by the way she had come, re-entering the park by the side gate into the lane, and as she went, she murmured brokenly over and over again:

"May God forgive me! May God forgive me!" He alone knows my temptation; it is only He who can understand—can understand."

And with a pitiful moan she disappeared amongst the trees of the park and was lost to sight, but not before a sharp pair of eyes had noted that strange coming and going.

Mildred Henley, the pretty young nursery governess of Hamdon Hall, went slowly down the great drive on a misty October afternoon, singing softly to herself as she went. She was very happy; life seemed just then a pleasant pathway! Nothing, it seemed to her, could be more ideal than the arrangement which had been made possible by Squire Hamdon's kindness, an arrangement by which she lived with her parents in the small white house within the



The Story of the Week. See our Coloured Cover.

boundaries of the park, and went daily to teach and amuse the children at the Hall.

The loss of much of her father's money two years before had made work for Mildred imperative, and at first she had come to and fro to the Hall from Middlewich, the nearest town. But when the White House—as it was called—fell vacant, Squire Hamdon offered it to Mr. Henley at an absurdly low rent, and Mildred's joy over the arrangement had amply repaid the kindly Squire for his act of thoughtfulness.

Mildred's happy little song was brought to an abrupt conclusion on that October afternoon by the apparition in her path of a tall, stalwart young man, who looked down on her with laughing, love-lit eyes, saying, "Well met, sweetheart; I walked up to escort you home."

"O, Jack, how lovely of you—there is heaps to tell you, and, no, you mustn't be silly any more!" And she drew herself out of his arms, lifting a rosy, laughing face, which he promptly kissed again before they resumed their way talking the happy, foolish lover's talk, which only lovers understand.

Presently, as they drew near to the place where the White House became visible through the trees, Jack said abruptly: "Mildred, darling, I hate to bring up worrying subjects, but is he keeping away just now?"

The girl's face turned white, her grip on her lover's arm tightened.

"Oh!" she cried, "don't let's talk of him to-night. He—he—" The eyes that met Frank's were wide and frightened. "I—I don't want to think of him to-night," and she shivered a little.

"Very well," was the grave answer, "but—look here, Mildred, you and I are to be husband and wife, so soon to be husband and wife, dear, with no secrets between us" (did she shiver again?) "promise that you will tell me if he comes to worry you again."

"I"—she hesitated perceptibly, and looked half-nervously about her—"I promise to tell you when he comes again," she said mechanically, and as if the words were dragged from her, and once more a shiver ran through her slight frame.

"That's right, sweetheart," Jack Denison's hearty voice had a cheering ring in it, "we must share all our troubles now, and never hide anything from each other."

"No—never hide anything from each other," she repeated, and there was still that mechanical note in her voice. "Ah! come in Jack, dear, out of the shadows, and let us—let us forget everything but that we belong to each other, and that we are to be married in a month!"

The change in her tone was so sudden, such a curious forced cheerfulness sounded in it, that Jack drew her once more into his arms.

"What is the matter?" he said, looking long and earnestly into her pretty white face. "You are not in trouble, dear? You have nothing on your mind?"

A vivid flush sprang over her face. "On my mind? What nonsense!" She drew herself out of his embrace. "How could I have anything on my mind? The Hamdons are good to me. I love the children, and I am to marry

you in a month." And, with a laugh, she broke from him, and ran into the house, whither he followed her.

The room they entered was cosy and home-like in a marked degree. A small fire burnt in the grate, and in an arm-chair beside it sat a venerable old man—Mildred's father, whose face lighted up at his daughter's entrance. By the table on which a lamp burnt brightly, sat a harassed-looking elderly woman, intent on some needlework. There was a careworn expression about her eyes and mouth, and the smile which greeted Mildred was a sad one, and at sight of the man's form behind the girl Mrs. Henley started violently, and her hands twitched nervously.

"Why!" she began shakily—then as her future son-in-law emerged into the light, she said with evident relief, "Oh! it is you, Jack! I might have guessed that."

"Yes, you might have guessed it," he answered gaily; but there was pity in the glance he threw at her careworn face. "Who but I would be likely to turn up in this promiscuous fashion?"

Though he spoke carelessly, his eyes scanned the face before him closely, and he noted that Mrs. Henley winced and grew pale.

"Nobody, my dear boy, nobody but you," Mr. Henley's hearty voice chimed in; "and now you are here, sit down and tell us the news from Middlewich."

Jack was the son and partner of a rising doctor of that town, and he always stored up little tit-bits of gossip for his prospective father-in-law, with whom also he was wont to discuss topics of the day, whilst sitting by the fire in such a position as to watch the sweet face of his betrothed, and to hear her soft voice when she either joined in the talk or spoke in undertones to her mother regarding some of the pile of needlework that of late had occupied both women's busy fingers.

"I am not very rich," Mildred said to him once, half-wistfully, half-playfully, "but I mean to come to you well endowed with clothes, and mother and I are as busy as bees making them all. You shall not have an ill-dressed wife, dear!"

It was a happy picture of family life in the White House that evening, and to a man who stood outside, shivering in the October mists, but peeping into the room through a chink in the shutters, it brought a great wave of bitter regret.

He could not have told anyone how long he stood there, his face pressed against the panes, watching how the lamp-light played upon the white head of the old man by the fire, gleamed golden on Mildred's soft curls, threw into relief the anxious face of Mildred's mother, whilst it lighted up the strong features of Jack Denison.

"All happy," the man outside muttered as he turned away. "God knows why I came back to-night. I am a fool for my pains, of course. I could have got clear away with that fifty she gave me, but—"

he shrugged his shoulders, and laughed a trifle hardly, "men like me are always fools. I had to come and look at them again. They in the light—In the shadow. Ah well!"

A LITTLE
RUSSIAN
GIRL

He shrugged his shoulders and slouched away, neither seeing nor hearing a man who crouched against the wall of the house behind a bush—watching his every movement; a man who never stirred until he had long vanished from the scene and who then rose slowly and stiffly from his hiding place and walked quickly away, murmuring to

himself with a contented chuckle: "If I don't pull off the trick, my name's not Henry Simmonds! The thing's as plain as a pikestaff and if I can finish the job as neatly as I've begun it, I ought to get something for my pains. The chap gave the show away when he talked out loud about that fifty!"

At the Hall on that same afternoon a strange conversation took place between Squire Hamdon and his wife; he, pacing up and down her boudoir in a dumb fury of indignation, she remonstrating, pleading, urging him—in vain.

"Maurice," she said at last, "I cannot bear it; there must be some explanation. Let me ask her! Let me talk to her about it—before—"

"No, I refuse absolutely," the Squire replied. "I have been more than good to these people and this is my reward. I refuse to do anything but let the law take its course. The thing is proved up to the hilt."

"But are you sure, dear? Are you certain?"

"Of course I am sure. There is no manner of doubt. I tell you the proofs are overwhelming. Once for all—my mind is made up—the law must take its course."

Jack had returned to Middlewich directly after the six o'clock tea which at the White House formed the chief evening meal, and the little house party settled down to their usual pursuits, Mildred amusing her father and mother with gay little stories of the quaint sayings and doings of her small pupils.

Mrs. Henley and she were sewing busily the while, and who can say how many tender dreams and loving thoughts were woven into the dainty garments the girl's hands fashioned. Through everything ran the golden thread of joy.

"Jack loves me; in a month I shall be his wife!"

Just as the grandfather clock in the hall struck eight a loud ring at the bell startled the inmates of the White House, and when a moment later the servant appeared at the sitting-room door, with scared face, and the words:

"Please, sir, please, ma'am, the policeman—he—" Mr.

Henley sprang to his feet saying:

"What on earth does the man want at this time of night? I'll go and speak to him."

"I'll step in, sir, if I may," came a gruff voice from the doorway, "and I'm sorry to trouble you, but a warrant's a warrant, and bound to be carried out early or late, and—"

"A warrant!" The old man gazed blankly into the policeman's impassive countenance.

"Yes, sir; you'll excuse me for interrupting you, but"—the man crossed the room and suddenly laid a hand on Mildred's shoulder—"I arrest you, miss, on a charge of stealing fifty pounds' worth of banknotes from your employer, Mr. Hamdon."

Mildred's face grew positively deathlike; her eyes looked up at the policeman with an expression of mute amazement that staggered the man of the law. Mrs. Henley uttered a low scream of horror, and sank back in her chair, seeming to grow all at once pathetically small and shrunken.

"My God!" she ejaculated under her breath, "my God!"

Mr. Henley stood behind her, his face rigid with horror.

"This is monstrous!" he said at last, with shaking voice.

"My daughter accused of crime? Are you mad?"

"No, sir," the man said respectfully; "but 'tis only fair you should know the facts. There was a bundle of notes on Mrs. Hamdon's writing-table in the morning-room a week ago, and nobody went into that room except Mrs. Hamdon herself and this young lady"—the hand on Mildred's shoulder pressed more heavily. "After Miss Henley left, the notes were missed, and I don't suppose she can deny as she paid the butcher's bill in Middlewich two days ago with a five-pound note—one of the missing ones," he added significantly.

"Ah—h!" The cry came from Mrs. Henley, who half rose from her chair, then dropped into it again in a half-fainting condition, moaning softly.

Mildred wrenched herself away from the detaining hand that gripped her, turning towards the policeman, her eyes flaming angrily.



"How——" she began; then all at once her voice faltered, broke, stopped entirely. Her eyes left the man's face, and travelled first to her father's—bewildered and outraged; next to her mother's—white, drawn, anguish-stricken, with eyes that met hers in agonised appeal, and then dropped to the ground, whilst the colour swept over her face, and ebbing quickly, left it ashen white.

"I—I," the girl's voice seemed choked; she put her hand to her throat with a convulsive gesture. "You need—not—be afraid—I—shall not resist you." There was a pause between each word. "I—will—go—with you—quietly—I—confess—my—guilt."

"Does the prisoner at the bar plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, my lord."

Every face in the crowded Court-house at Middlewich flashed round towards the dock, where Mildred Henley stood, her face drawn and white, her eyes fixed upon the blank wall above the judge's head.

A murmur ran round the Court, quickly suppressed by a frown from the judge, and a strange and ominous silence followed those three words—"Guilty, my lord."

A man seated a few paces away from the place where the prisoner stood dropped his head on his hands with a groan. It was Jack Denison, and to him, as to many others in the packed building, those words had come as a fresh and terrible blow. And yet even now, as his own sober reflection told him, he ought to have expected nothing else!

Mildred had never for an instant wavered in her declaration of guilt, nor had she allowed her agonised father or her distracted lover to provide counsel for her defence, or try to improve matters by pleading extenuating circumstances.

"I cannot say either more or less," she had repeated over and over again with sad firmness when these two who loved her visited her in the county gaol, "I plead guilty, I accept the consequences, I will bear the punishment." And though her lips had quivered pitifully over the last words, though the agony in Jack's eyes had made her stretch out her hands to him with a yearning, appealing gesture, she had not yielded to his supplications.

"I will not allow father and you to have the expense of a useless defence," she said. "I plead guilty; let me be spared the misery of a long trial. I plead guilty."

It had been her cry throughout, and now the day had come when before the crowded court, in sight of all her little world, she once more declared herself guilty of the crime of theft.

"Best thing she could 'a' done," one constable whispered to another. "She'll maybe get a lighter sentence than if she'd brazened it out, and the proofs against her were overwhelming."

If the silence that followed the prisoner's avowal of guilt seemed long to those who sat and watched her, what did it seem to the girl herself, who stood, the silent recipient of all those curious, unfriendly glances.

The torture of the moments that dragged by like centuries was well-nigh unbearable—a great longing to cover her face, to shrink back into some dark hiding-place, never to see another human being again overwhelmed her. She caught her breath, and her hands groped out to the rail in front of her, and gripped it fiercely.

All the faces before her seemed to run together into a dazzling flash of whiteness, and then to waver up and down sickeningly. A great blackness began to wrap her round, a thick mist came before her eyes, and very far away out of the mist she was suddenly aware of a grave judicial voice pronouncing her sentence. She swayed a little where she stood, trying to collect her forces sufficiently to take in what the judge was saying, when, all at once, a shrill woman's voice broke in upon those grave tones—a thin, high voice, that went wailing through the Court, and penetrated the thick darkness with which Mildred felt herself surrounded.

"I cannot do it!" the voice wailed out. "I cannot let her be punished for my sake. I am guilty—not my daughter. I am guilty—I stole the notes!"

The hurried attempt to restore order failed completely as these last words were uttered. A storm of sound broke over the crowd, and the flash of faces turned towards the place where the mother of the prisoner stood, her arms outstretched towards the judge, the tears raining down her careworn face.

"I stole the notes," she repeated, in a firm voice, and then her strength seemed to fail her, and with a cry she sank down in a crumpled heap at her husband's feet.

The sequel is soon told. Mrs. Henley's tardy confession, prompted by horror at hearing sentence pronounced upon her daughter, was proved to be a true one.

It transpired that a ne'er-do-well son—Hal by name—had for years preyed upon his poor parents and upon his sister, draining upon their resources, and rendering their lives a burden by his constant escapades, and worse than escapades.

A sudden demand from him for money had driven his mother to the verge of distraction. No longer daring to ask his father to help him, hiding the matter even from Mildred, Mrs. Henley had determined to try and raise the money herself and had planned a visit to the Squire to negotiate a loan. Passing the morning-room window, which opened upon the terrace at the Hall, she had glanced into the empty room, and seeing the bundle of notes on the writing-table had been seized by a terrible temptation, and, for the sake of her idolised son, had stolen the whole packet.

And then, as often so strangely happens, she had attracted suspicion to Mildred by unwittingly substituting a note she had in the house for one of those out of the bundle, whilst giving the latter to her daughter to pay the household books.

In the dead of night she had given the stolen notes to her son, and had crept home again, unaware that her movements were watched by the shrewd constable, Henry Simmonds, who mistook her for Mildred.

The poor lady never paid the penalty of her misdeeds; the anxiety, the shock, and the final effort of confession, proved too much for an already weakened frame, and she sank to rest two days after that terrible scene in the Court-house.

"And did you guess who had really taken the money?" Jack Denison asked his wife long months afterwards, when she had partially recovered from the strain she had undergone.

"Yes," she said simply. "It all flashed upon me as the policeman laid his hand on my arm, and said—'I arrest you.' I seemed to understand it then, and my mind was made up at once. Just for one mad moment I almost flamed out at him in the hot indignation of innocence, then I knew what I must do, and I did it. I pleaded guilty, dear, because I knew it was the only thing I could do to draw away all suspicion from my poor mother. I did it—For Her Sake."

L. G. Moberly.



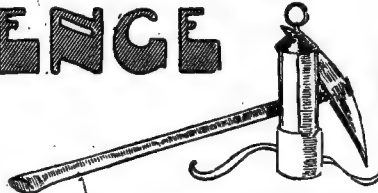
Rather Overdid It.

SHE: "You remember what you promised before we were married? You said you would make every effort to make yourself worthy of me." He: "Yes; and the result was that I overdid it, and made myself better than you deserve."



A FATAL REVENGE

THE TALE OF
A FIGHT.



It was Sunday afternoon. The sound of church bells ringing was wafted across the still air and fell as if in gentle reproach upon the ears of four men. They were sentinels, and each stood upon the summit of a little promontory, and eagerly scanned the surrounding country, as if fearful of the approach of some dreaded invaders.

Meanwhile, down in a little valley below them, was raging a dreadful fight. First one side was getting the better of the fray, and then the other. The ever varying issues of the struggle were made known to the four sentries by the low, suppressed cries from the adherents of the different parties which continually rent the air.

Ever and anon a messenger would leave the struggling, shouting mass below, and run swiftly to the sentries, going from one to the other with anxious inquiries, and admonishing them afresh to keep a vigorous outlook.

Yet this was no historic battlefield. The scene of all this anxiety and commotion was a retired bit of rugged waste land in the suburbs of Durham. The sentries were four ragged lads; the dreaded invaders, the police; the terrible battle was between two men.

There they stood, bruised and bleeding, their seconds at their sides, and a crowd of unassorted roughs cheering them on to further blows.

Both men seemed played out. Yet one had evidently the mastery. This was Jim Mulligan. The other, half blinded with the blood that poured from his eyes and nose, his face terribly swollen, and already half dead, was Bill Ganger.

Hanging about the outskirts of the crowd, as if longing to learn how the struggle was going, yet daring not to look upon the mutilated countenance of his son, was Bob Ganger, the father of the worsted combatant. Groaning to himself he wandered up and down, his hands before his face, for he loved his blackguard son more dearly than his life. He would willingly have rushed in and thrust himself between his offspring and the sledge-hammer blows of the powerful Jim. Yet he knew the attempt would be in vain.

The rabble crowd, revelling in the sight of blood and the heavy thud of the blows as they fell thick and furious, would permit no interruption.

Three minutes more and "Cad" Ganger, as he was called among his fellow roughs, fell heavily to the ground. But even as he staggered and received the last cruel blow which felled him he showed no signs of the agonies he must have been suffering. His whole mind was overflowing with one thought, an intense, unquenchable hatred for the man who now stood over him—his victor.

At the moment when Bill Ganger fell there was a suppressed yet distinct shout from one of the sentries, "Coppers!" The word was passed with amazing celerity from mouth to mouth, and in three minutes' time the evil mass of dilapidated human beings had melted away.

Upon the deserted piece of common land Bill Ganger was still stretched at full length. He was groaning piteously—but not from pain. It was his rage and disappointment that overmastered him. He lay there biting the dust with his teeth, and tearing up the grass by handfuls. He rolled from side to side reviling his antagonist, and blaspheming in a way

which made his poor old father tremble as he stooped over his prostrate form.

Evidently the alarm of "police" had been a false one, for no one appeared to interrupt the ravings of the conquered man.

Presently he staggered to his feet. Without a word he leant upon his father's arm, and turned away from the scene of the fray towards the little barrow in which their faithful Jenny was patiently standing. For many miles they rattled

over the cobbled streets towards their living place amongst the gloomy slums.

Little had old Bob imagined when he had set out that morning, with his son at his side and Jim Mulligan laughing and cracking jokes as his long legs dangled out from behind the little coster cart, what the two desperate men took the trip for, and why they had growled at him when he had declared his intention of going on the "spree" with them.

Now he saw it all. Presently he turned sententially to Bill. "What did ye want to fight 'im for? Yers bin fooling around his gal agin. Didn't I tell yer to chuck that? She don't care for you and she do for Jim, so what's the good of busting yerself?"

"E's done me this time," growled Bill, "but we ain't through yet. Not by a long chalk. S'elp me, I'll have his life yet, yer see if I don't." And the battered, bleeding giant relapsed once more into stolid silence.

The threat was an evil one, but Bill meant what he said.

The next morning broke dull and cheerless. Bill Ganger's state of mind had not improved. All the night he had tossed about, for the throbbing of his bandaged head had driven all sleep far from him. When he roused himself to tramp with his father to the neighbouring mines, he was still turning over in his mind the easiest method of avenging himself for his double defeat both in love and with the fists.

Jim was working at the same pit as themselves, which fact made the old father Ganger tremble for the man's safety. How would the two work side by side? he vaguely wondered, as he and Bill trudged slowly along with their pickaxes thrown over their shoulders.

Presently they arrived at the mouth of the shaft. They stepped into the bucket, and were lowered at a terrific rate into the darkness of the subterranean world.



A dreadful fight was raging in the valley, the ever varying issues being made known by the cries of the spectators.

Much to Bob Ganger's relief the day passed by quietly enough. The two rivals scowled at one another, but neither uttered a word.

Yet old Ganger saw enough in his son's face to show that his threat had not been forgotten. The fiery hatred was still burning within his heart.

Many years before Bill Ganger had loved a lass that lived in the same street as they did. Then Mulligan had come into those parts, and got before him in the race. He had stepped quietly in and asked the girl to become his wife, and poor Bill Ganger had been left out in the cold.

Ever since that time the two men had hated one another with a loathing which had culminated in the pre-arranged fight on that Sunday afternoon.

The time for knocking off work had now come round, and all the men engaged in that stage of the mine had already been hoisted up.

Around the foot of the shaft there stood in a group father and son Ganger, and Jim Mulligan. The lamps fixed on to their miner's hats threw a weird and flickering light upon the three men.

Suddenly they heard the bucket rapidly descending. With a jerk it came to a standstill within two feet of the ground. Bill Ganger sprang inside. "Come, Jim," he called out, "get in sharp."

There was a wild look in Bill's eyes that scared old Ganger.

"Go up by yourself, boy," he called out. "I want Jim here for a moment." With an angry scowl Bill Ganger gave the signal to the man far away up top, and after fifty seconds of rapid ascent found himself once more in the fresh air.

As if moved by some sudden and wholly irresistible impulse, he turned round as he was on the point of leaving the office.

The man at the engine was waiting for the signal to lower. Another moment, and the bell rang sharply twice. Then the great iron bucket was dropped at a bewildering speed once more into the bowels of the earth for its last load that night.

With practised steady eye the old engineer was busy watching the huge cable unroll from the big conical drum before him. On either side of him were the two huge engines panting and puffing as if chafing at being used for such frivolous work.

Bill waited for a moment when the old man was stooping down over the machines. Then he stole swiftly past, and with his pickaxe hung on to his shoulder climbed down the slippery ladder which ran down the whole length of the shaft. When he had gone down some one hundred feet, he left the ladder and clambered on to a tiny ledge formed in the dripping sides of the shaft.

Was he in time for his purpose? He glanced at the cable. It was still now.

Evidently they were loading up below. So far so good.

Five minutes passed—ten minutes passed, and still there were no signs of the bucket being hauled up. Bold and desperate man that he was, he did not half like the delay.

It is one thing to commit a crime on the spur of the moment, and quite another to sit in a dark hole with drops of water dripping at slow intervals down the neck—waiting.

The natural rumblings of the pit seemed suddenly to have attained fresh meaning. At every noise the man started.

He felt a cold sweat breaking out over him. Would the cable never begin to go up again? The miserable man waited for what seemed to his strained nerves an eternity. Then he became too nervous to bear the suspense and solitude any longer. He made for the slimy ladder once again.

At that instant he caught the sound of the bell far away above. It rang sharply three times.

At the sound all his courage returned to him. Calling himself a coward, he stepped back, and took up his position once again.

Another second, and he saw, far below, the bucket coming up. Even looking such a long way down beneath him his eyes, accustomed to the flickering of the lamps, distinguished the burly form of his father, and by his side the slimmer figure of his enemy. He sighed a sigh of genuine relief as he noticed that his father was on the side of the bucket furthest removed from him. This was exactly what he had hoped for.

His black eyes gleamed with pleasure and hatred. Kneeling on both knees, his pickaxe tightly clasped in both hands, Bill Ganger leant over the shaft. The engines were running unusually slowly.

Had the two men who were being hauled up the shaft happened to glance upwards, they would both have been startled by the apparition.

The man, his face blackened by the dust, his hair streaming over his forehead, looked more like some fiend of darkness than a human being.

The cable was running faster now. He raised his weapon above him, fearing he should after all miss his prey.

As the two heads appeared just beneath him, Bill brought down the pickaxe with all his might. The blow was beautifully aimed.

Bill Ganger had his revenge!

As the bucket rushed upwards the victim was dragged by the axe on to the ledge, and Ganger, who had hauled with all his might to prevent himself being dragged forwards into the abyss, dropped to the ground, and the body fell with a sounding thud across him.

He glanced at the face as he scrambled to his feet. Then suddenly an awful cry broke the stillness of that black pit.

It was a scream of fearful and intense agony which no words could ever describe. The scream echoed strangely round and round the pit. A moment went by, and then, with another irrepressible burst of intense terror and affliction, the cry went up once more.

The body was not that of Jim Mulligan!

"Father! Father! Oh, speak to me," he cried in agony. His cry was echoed and re-echoed again and again. Above him and far below he heard his words taken up and repeated as if by some mocking fiends. Yet no answer came.

At that moment he heard the cable running out again. He could not be found as he was. With a fixed determined glare in his fierce eyes he seized the mutilated body of his father. Then with another heart-rending scream he leapt with his terrible burden into the darkness.

P. L. Jones.



With a fixed determined look in his eyes, he seized his father and leapt into the darkness.



WON BY LOYALTY.

Tell us of Some Stolen Jewels and a
Lover's Test.

making voluntary secrets of a hundred little actions of life, and loving solitude in an alarming manner.

All this was off-set by eyes so beautiful, by a colouring so marvellous, by an expression so divine, that I had not the courage to reflect on the singularity of her character. I loved her, and often passed hours of the night sitting before her doorstep, simply dreaming "that she lived here," and meditating on her presence as does the believer on the transubstantiation.

I did not know, in the first place, whether she loved me or not; she always refused to answer that question, referring to the wishes of her parents and her confidence in their wisdom. If I insisted, she generally ended by saying "that she knew nothing about it, but that she felt no antipathy towards me, and that, according to her ideas, was enough to decide a young girl on marriage!" In vain I supplicated, in vain I tried to animate this enigmatical being; she remained as distant as the manner in which she loved, as unknown as she was dominating.

One evening as I was dreaming a little sadly of these things, a commotion was heard in the house. I returned to the salon, where everything was in disorder, my hosts were distressed, their friends embarrassed and troubled, and old Mme. Laroche horribly pale and trembling.

"What in the world has happened?" I asked. They explained incoherently that Mme. Laroche's diamonds were stolen—old family diamonds of great value. All the servants had been summoned into an adjoining room—in short, a formal search was to be instituted. An old gentleman, M. Coppé, had been unanimously selected to direct this investigation, just as I was entering, and his first proposition was that everyone should submit, or, rather, offer himself to be searched. Although the thing was rather offensive, no one protested, and it was decided that, after the servants, each person present should be examined.

To tell the truth, all this seemed of small importance beside my personal cares; and, with several others, I awaited the end of the adventure, while M. Coppé, his two witnesses and our host, began the inspection of the domestics.

Very soon I fell again into my meditation, my eyes fixed on the fireplace as though there were a fire, when suddenly I felt a light touch on my elbow. I raised my head with a start, to see my fiancée looking at me most beseechingly. We were alone near the fireside, and could talk in low tones without being overheard. She murmured very low:

"If you love me, arrange that they search you first; then try to be near me and, without being seen, try to conceal the object that I shall pass you from behind."

My blood ran cold. This annoying incident became terrible, filling me with the most passionate trouble. I looked at the girl in agony, but forced myself to smile, and whispered:

"It shall be as you wish!"

My knees trembled, my mouth was hot and dry. The feeling that overwhelmed me was inexpressible. It was a

confused fervent love, devotion without limit, a desire noble and perverse.

Jeanne had thanked me with hardly perceptible movement of the lips; she stood by the wall with an air of indifference and pride!

"They are very long about it," she said sternly. "M. Coppé is a man of method," someone replied. And a silence followed which told more and more on one's nerves, for even the waiting in a peaceful frame of mind finished by disturbing and emptying the brain, like a pump. However, the moment arrived when the searching of the servants ended, the door opened, disclosing our host, the two witnesses, and the old gentleman.

My heart beat furiously. I felt myself become terribly pale, but, concealing my agitation and steadying my voice, I asked to be searched first.

M. Coppé smiled at what he considered the whim of a young man, and proceeded methodically to my examination. I blushed, I became pale, without anyone finding that peculiar under the circumstances. When it was over, I made two or three steps backward and I found myself near Jeanne. She lowered her fan and handed me something with a coolness that was only equalled by my calmness in seizing the object and placing it in a pocket of my coat. After which I leant against the fireplace, being now merely a witness and above all suspicion.

M. Coppé's search was unproductive of results. There remained nothing to do but to visit all the rooms and then inform the police.

Still my trouble of mind increased as I remained standing by the fireplace. My brain was in a whirl, and I felt the crime weigh on me as though I were indeed the thief!

Jeanne at last came towards me, with that undulating step of hers, and gave me a look of such passionate gratitude that it almost seemed to scorch me. Then in an imperative low tone she said:

"Do you still love me?"

I did not hesitate. I replied firmly:

"Yes."

"In spite of all that I have done?"

"In spite of everything!"

"Will you marry me?"

"I will marry you."

She enveloped me with the same look, still warmer and more lingering. I fully comprehended the power of woman, above all law, human or natural, drawn from the fountain-head and against which nothing ought to prevail.

I felt strangely happy in this equivocal adventure, and I could not throw off this happiness for which I reproached myself and of which I was terribly ashamed.

As I was struggling with those contending emotions, exclamations were heard and I saw M. Coppé reappear holding a little box.

"We have the jewels and the guilty one!" he said very calmly.

I had only time to hear this much and to see the livid face of the valet—the guilty one—when I found that Jeanne was gently urging me out on to the terrace where the shadows lay thickly. There I felt my head seized with two hands, while two pure lips were pressed to mine, as Jeanne murmured:

"The thief adores you! She has tricked you! To test your love she gave you her own box!"

H. Smythe.

A REMARKABLE LETTER.

GIFT OF £50 FROM ONE READER TO THE REST.

Last week we received the following communication from an anonymous correspondent living in America :

DAYTON, OHIO, U.S.A.
NOVEMBER 25th, 1902.

DEAR EDITOR AND FRIEND,

In February, 1894, I received from you a cheque for £10 as a prize in connection with a competition that ran in *SHORT STORIES*.

That £10 was the foundation of a fortune which I have now, thank God, accumulated. I was a single young man at the time, and could find no employment in England. So, with the help of the £10, I emigrated to America, and, after knocking about New York for a few months, found my way to Dayton. Here I started in the cycle business and, when the boom came in 1897 and 1898, I made a lot of money. This money I speculated with and have now turned into a fortune.

My reason for writing you is to express my gratitude to you for having offered the £10, and to say that I have now decided to give to the readers of *SHORT STORIES*, through the medium of your paper, five times this amount every year I am spared.

I therefore inclose you bills for two hundred and fifty dollars, and ask you to distribute these in five sums of £10 each amongst the readers of *SHORT STORIES* in a competition the nature of which I leave to yourself. All I ask is that the announcement may be made and the competition closed in time for the prize money to reach the winners during February, which is the month in which I received my first £10.

You are, of course, at liberty to publish this letter, but I do not append my name as I have no desire for notoriety, and simply make this offer out of pure gratitude in the hope that those who receive the £10 prizes will turn them to as good account as I was able to turn my £10.

Your Obedient Servant,

DAYTON.

This letter is certainly the most gratifying and remarkable one that I have received since *SHORT STORIES* started, and it gives me great pleasure to publish it. I have given the matter very careful consideration, and have arrived at the conclusion that, as my anonymous correspondent was in great want when he won his prize, the most satisfactory manner of distributing his gift of £50 would be to offer it to those who can give me the best reason for receiving it.

You may be wanting to emigrate to one of our Colonies. You may want £10 to buy something you have needed for a long time. You may want to clear off some small debts that have been worrying you. Or you may want to trade with the £10 and, like "Dayton," turn it into a fortune.

Whatever your reason for wanting it may be, write it down in the space below, and send it to "The Competition Editor of *SHORT STORIES*," Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "Dayton."

Readers may send as many reasons as they like, provided each is written on a separate coupon. Another coupon will appear next week.

CUT OUT THE COUPON HERE.

My reason for wanting £10 is.....

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Name..... Address.....



THE MAN IN.

The Love Tale of a Bailiff's Man.

"Your name 'Arris?" said the man, as he slipped his foot inside the door of 21 Bitters Street.

The man in shirt-sleeves and slippers, one of which had been unsparingly carved to accommodate a gouty foot, looked half-puzzled, half-alarmed, and nodded.

"Got a bit of trouble for you," said the first man, stepping on to the door-mat and drawing a long folded paper from his pocket.

Mr. Harris shut the door incontinently, and turned a trifle paler than he had been looking for the last few months, although that was manifest enough for his neighbours to have remarked it.

"Summons?" he interrogated laconically, as he nervously watched the visitor unfold the paper.

"Worse—worse. Distraint upon your goods and chattels for arrears of payment—seven—eighteen—six. Can you pay it?"

"Seven—eighteen! Distraint? And after I went and saw Mr. Street—er, the manager, and told him I was sorry I'd got backward with the payments, and would start again as soon as I was able to return to work, which I hoped to be able to do after Christmas; and he said it would no doubt be all right, and he'd see the boss for me and arrange to give me the time and the missus out too, and 'ill come home—"

"Can you pay?" repeated Mr. Harris, leaning against the wall for support. "How do they bring it up to that? The original debt was only seven pound, and I paid two-ten of that."

"Can't help it; there it is—seven—eighteen—six. The only question's—can you pay?"

"I've been out of work four months and more."

"Can you pay?"

"No," said Mr. Harris, resting on his sound foot, and looking wretchedly at the visitor.

The latter went to the door, opened it, put his head out and whistled to his man waiting outside.

"Come in," said the first visitor to the second, who closed the door behind him and looked at his victim indifferently.

The newcomer was a man about fifty, with a large ruddy nose, watery blue eyes, and a long, shaven upper-lip. He wore a frock coat and a hard felt hat, and linen wrist-bands which slipped down to his big knuckles whenever he dropped his arms to his sides. His black trousers were too long for his legs, and his boots creaked distressingly.

Twenty minutes after his entry he bade farewell to his bailiff from the front door-step, and, closing the door, returned to the front room, before the fire in which Mr. Harris was sitting nursing his suffering foot.

The man drew up a chair to the fire, with all the assurance of one in possession, and sat down.

For a long time there was silence.

"It ain't your fault you're here," said Mr. Harris at length, stirring the fire with an old stair-rod, which had been pressed

into service as a poker. "So there ain't any reason why we shouldn't make you as easy as we can."

"That's a very sensible way of looking at it; it ain't no use raving and tearing my hair. Here I am and here I've got to stop until the money's paid or the goods cleared," responded the man stoically.

"But they must be stoney-hearted people to put in a bailiff two days before Christmas, seeing as how I told 'em just as how I was

placed," said Mr. Harris lugubriously, picking up small pieces of cinder from the hearth and throwing them on the fire. "They're rich and could have afforded to wait until I could get back to work."

"They're rich, because they're wise," said the man sententiously. "And being wise they agree that people gen'ly have money about Christmas time and object to bailiffs joining the family circle. Consequently it's a good time to press for payment."

"But they know I haven't got the money," protested Mr. Harris angrily. "Eight pound! Where am I to get eight pound, and Christmas rent and rates coming along. Haven't earned a penny since the end of July, and here I am with you in the house demanding eight pound by menace, as the saying is."

"And it looks to me," said the man, glancing round the room with the eye of a valuer, "that there'll be precious little left in the house when I'm gone. Things fetch very little by forced auction, for the auctioneer knows to a penny how much he's got to raise, and it don't matter if he has to sell the whole lot so long as he covers the debt and expenses. There's that sideboard there. Now I daresay you gave as much as three pound—"

"Three-fifteen not a couple of year ago," Mr. Harris interjected.

"Did you re'ly. Why, I've seen boards lot better than that knocked down for fifteen shillings scores of times. This table suits your purpose all right, I don't doubt; but it wouldn't fetch more than a crown."

Mr. Harris groaned inwardly.

"Any children?"

"Girl, eighteen, out at service," replied Mr. Harris absently, examining his pouch in a vain effort to find a few shreds of tobacco.

The act suggested to the man that his own pipe had long been cold. He drew it from his pocket, filled, lighted, and puffed at it with gusto.

"Couldn't your daughter lend you the money out of her savings?" he suggested, not appreciating the envious glances his victim turned on the smoking pipe.

"She's sent us all her savings already," Harris returned gruffly.

"Well," said the man, with an air of finality, as he stretched out his short legs and tilted his chair back, "the longer I'm here, the bigger the bill."

"What's that matter!" shouted Harris, banging the table with his clenched fist. "You can't sell us up twice!"

There was a footstep in the passage, and the door opened before Harris could rise from his chair.

He looked at the little woman who entered imploringly, and, hobbling round the table, whispered a few words in her ear.

Her face, which in her youth must have been very pretty grew pale as death; and she sank upon a chair near the door and burst into tears.

Meanwhile the man, still with his chair tilted on its back legs, was smoking and gazing into the fire, a picture of apathy.

"It ain't any good your taking on like that, marm," he said, with mild conviction, glancing over the articles on the mantelshelf. "What is to be, is; the inevitable must be so, Christmas time or doomsday. I'm always sorry for people when they make me as comfortable as they can, and don't object to doing a few odd jobs by way of exercise. But I can't put up my hand and say, 'Stand back, law, and let this party alone. Law is law, same for me as for you.'"

"He's right, Martha," said Harris soothingly. "It ain't any use crying. Come, now, come. Things are never so bad but what they might be worse."

"Very sensibly said," exclaimed the man, rising and shooting back his refractory wrist-bands. He might have added that when things are at their worst they're sure to turn round.

He did not intend to cast any personal reflection on himself, but it was not inappropriate that he wheeled about at that instant. He looked at Mrs. Harris and blinked. He looked again, watched her staunching her tears, and an expression of half-wonder, half-amazement, crossed his face. He wheeled round again quickly and poked the fire to hide his embarrassment the moment she looked at him.

It was a queer situation, good gracious! He'd been in some queer situations since he first took to the work, and had grown hardened to them. But this—this beat everything! There was no error in his mind; there couldn't be; Harris had called her Martha, and his own eyes had seen in her face the ghost of what had been, twenty—twenty years ago, the pretty face of Martha Hall! And here he was in their house—going to sell 'em up! He'd forgotten all about this old thirst for revenge, how he had hated her, who had "chosen a better man." Here he was in the "better man's" house, sitting on the "better man's" furniture by order of the Court, costing him money and food every day he remained? And Christmas coming! A fine old spectre at the feast he'd be, especially for her if she had really recognised him! Harris, of course, didn't know. Perhaps she'd tell him though—tell him that the man in—the man going to sell 'em up, was the man who had courted her only to be thrown away like a broken band-box the moment Harris had come along. He had never thought of such a situation, even when his hatred was most imaginative.

But it was uncomfortable. She *had* been a pretty girl! He remembered how she looked the day—aye, and there was still something of that in her face. It was an uncomfortable situation, when all was said and done. The people might have waited till after Christmas, hang it! To sell up a woman's home when her husband's been ill for four months and just about to be able to return to work, it might be business, but— Still, there might be friends in the background who'd come up to the scratch. He didn't want anybody to say that he'd taken to the job on the mere chance of getting his own back after twenty years. He didn't like to see anybody's home broken up—wasn't natural he should. It was a horrible way of earning money—brokering. He wondered it had never struck him so before.

Suddenly he became aware that, by persistent poking, he had raked all the fire out of the grate. He looked round, expecting to find himself alone; but Mrs. Harris was still sitting by the door. Her hands were folded on her lap, and her eyes were blindly fixed on him. Seeing she did not appear to remember him, he permitted himself to examine her face more attentively, wondering whether it were not possible he was mistaken. And for some seconds they stared at each other in this manner.

"It is hard, isn't it, now?" she said, collecting her thoughts by a supreme mental effort, and looking at him sorrowfully. "I shall never survive it, if it comes to the worst. After twenty years' married life, and never a dark day until John fell ill, to be sold up a day or two off Christmas."

"It ain't my doing," he said, shamefacedly, "I'm only an instrument of torture. This is the last job of the kind I'll touch."

"Somehow I seem to know your face—you don't look a hard-hearted sort, either."

He stretched out his hands to reach the back of a chair. Somehow his hands, though nothing out of the common, always seemed to accentuate any awkwardness that happened to be perceptible to him. But, remembering the trick of his wristbands, he folded his arms behind his back, and, tilting himself on his heels, attentively regarded a grease-spot on the carpet.

"Don't say your name—your name's Walker?" said Mrs. Harris faintly.

"It's the hand of Fate, Mar—marm, the hand of Fate," he said, sighing profoundly, and, again forgetting his wristbands, nervously fingering a corner of the table-cloth.

"It's an ill-omen," she returned, as she rose weakly, and left the room.

He remained balanced on his heels and the corner of the mantel-shelf for some seconds. He'd have given something to have known what Mrs. Harris was saying to her husband in the back-room. He was not above listening, perhaps, but he wore creaking boots and the width of the room separated him from the door.

Harris brought him a cup of tea, and three wedges of bread and butter, and put them on the table.

"Hope I ain't keeping you from the fire," said Mr. Walker, forgetting it was out.

"No," replied Harris, more truthfully than he thought. It was a weary-dreary tone he used; there was no suggestion of malice in it. From which fact Mr. Walker drew the deduction that Harris had not been told.

"I say," Walker exclaimed, as Harris was leaving, "haven't you got any friends who'll help you out of this?"

"No," in the same weary-dreary tone. The flesh of the spectre had worn off, leaving the mere skeleton; the cruelty of it, the sharpness, relentlessness of the creditors had faded from Harris' mind, leaving the bare fact that his home was to be sold up.

"That's bad," muttered Walker, stirring his tea. "That's bad!"

He continued stirring his tea long after Harris had left the room. He broke a slice of bread-and-butter, and, resting an arm on the table, turned a pair of melancholy blue eyes at the heap of cinders on the hearth. Somehow he didn't feel hungry, nor very thirsty, for that matter, though he had a sort of fancy that a drop of something warm would have done him good. He felt low, not exactly unwell, but low, dispirited. It might have been that a change had occurred in the weather. But if he left the bread and butter the Harris would probably think he was dissatisfied with it, and it would put them out.

He wrapped up the bread and butter in a piece of newspaper and put it in his pocket, then emptied the contents of the tea-cup into the pot of a "parlour-fern" in the window.

Going into the passage he coughed twice to attract attention. As nobody came, he went to the kitchen door and knocked gently.

"I'm just going home to fetch a brush and comb, and such like," he said, pleasantly. "Shan't be long. If my bailiff should happen to look in, you



might say I've gone round to see him. I'm not supposed to go, you know."

"All right," said Harris' weary-dreary voice.

Mr. Walker went out, closing the door quietly after him. Half-way down the street he met a scraggy little boy, to whom he disposed of his bread and butter.

He went home and made straight for the upstairs parlour. The room was in darkness, but he groped his way to a cupboard beside the fireplace, and drew from the corner a box. He opened the box and took something from it, replaced it, re-locked the cupboard, and went out again. He went straight to his bailiff.

"What's this mean?" was the gruff query that met him.

"I know it ain't in order," said Walker, scratching his head with the brim of his hat, "but they found the money, and wanted to get me out, but I wasn't keen on staying, and, as he could not come, and she didn't like to, I said—knowing 'it would be safe, as I had the money—I said I'd bring it along."

"Oh, there ain't no 'arm in that," said the bailiff. "Where's your paper? Ten-pound note, eh? I thought as much. As soon as I saw 'im I knew he could get 'old of money when pressed. And one pound's right."

Mr. Walker counted out the change tendered him carefully, and, having put it in his pocket, watched his bailiff fold up the bank-note and thrust it in a small cash-box. He had never before seen so little change out of a ten-pound note.

"Well, that's all square," said the bailiff. "You're going back with the change, I s'pose?"

Walker nodded.

"What are you—— Oh, you want your fee, don't you? There you are."

Walker took the half-crown the other pushed towards him eagerly. It was a little more change out of his ten-pound note.

"I suppose I can consider myself out?" he asked as he went to the door.

"Yes, oh, yes! But look in in the morning, I've got another job for you."

"Not me," said Walker, without waiting to be heard, "I've chucked it."

On his way back to the Harrises' he passed a furniture shop, in one window of which was displayed a second-hand dining-room suite. He had promised himself—worse, he had promised the missus, as a Christmas present that suite for the shop-parlour. (Mrs. Walker kept a second-hand clothes establishment). It was an elegant suite, and he had only missed it through his tendency to keep his money as long as possible, and now it was gone, and the suite—

He didn't mind so much for himself, though since he'd be more at home in future than heretofore, he *should* have liked the suite. But it was for the missus he regretted; yet not perhaps so much for her as because of her. Mrs. Walker's temperament was not all Mr. Walker would have wished.

Harris opened the door to him, for he knocked and waited, just to show them that he knew they might have locked him out if they had willed.

Mrs. Harris was making up a bed for him on the parlour sofa when he entered the room.

"I'll make you as comfortable as I can," she said sadly.

"You're very kind," he said, looking at her and hunting in her face for all that was still there to remind him of Martha Hall. "But I shan't be sleeping here, in fact, I'm paid out!"

"Paid out!" cried she, gasping.

"Yes, I went round to see my bailiff, and he said he was just coming to take me out, as a gentleman had been in very mysteriously, saying he was a very old friend of yours, and, hearing you were distrained upon, and having a bit of money, he didn't quite know what to do with, would pay out the execution."

"A gentleman—old friend? John, John!" She rushed out of the room.

Mr. Walker put his hand in his pocket, and produced the last complete pound of his ten-pound note.

"It won't buy the suite," he said ruefully. So he pushed it under a log of the American clock on the mantelshelf.

"Is this right—square, eh?" exclaimed Harris, limping into the room, his face alight with excitement, and followed by his wife.

"I'm pleased to say it is; it must be since I've orders to clear out," replied Walker, shooting back his wrist-bands violently.

"And he didn't say who he was?" asked Harris.

"No; he was an old friend of your wife's."

"Well——!" gasped Harris.

"God bless him, whoever he is," said Mrs. Harris, with a strange glance at Walker. "You'll stop and have a bit of supper with us, won't you?"

"I must get home," said he, smiling wisely. He did not wish to be questioned ere he could anticipate the questions. But, if I may, I'll look in for a minute on Christmas Day and drink your health!"

He did.

He was sitting in the shop-parlour an hour later, his mind divided between a paper and his thoughts, when a pair of piercing eyes glanced at him from either side of a hatched nose.

"James, w'en's that furniture comin'?"

"The suite?" murmured Walker, to gain time.

"The suite! What else d'yer think I meant?"

"I don't know," tingling from head to foot.

"I should think not! When's it comin'?"

"Fraid it ain't coming, my dear."

"Sold? I told you what it would be! That comes of leavin' it——"

"It ain't sold; I ain't got the money." He braced himself up for the effort. "I met Bobbin to-day, and he asked me for the ten pound I owed him."

"An' you paid it? You silly, fat man, why didn't you tell 'im you 'adn't got it?"

"Why—well—I couldn't go and tell a downright lie. He said he wanted it."

He drew a deep breath and muttered to himself, "I hope he don't" before Mrs. Walker began.

C. Randolph-Lichfield.

A DUTCH paper publishes the following significant advertisement from a disconsolate wife—"Adolphus. Return to your Matilda. The piano has been sold."

FOND PARENT: "Bobby, Bobby, you ought not to laugh because that old lady fell down." Bobby: "I didn't, pa. I was laughing because she couldn't get up."

MOTHER: "Tom, you mustn't go fishing with Freddy Slowcum. He is just getting over the measles." Tom: "There won't be any danger, ma. I never catch anything when I'm fishing."

ANGRY CUSTOMER: "Hullo, you waiter, where is that ox-tail soup?" Waiter: "Coming, sir—half a minute." Customer: "Confound you, how slow you are!" Waiter: "Fault of the soup, sir. Ox-tail is always behind!"

VISITOR: "Are you going to be a great man when you grow up, Willie?" Willie: "Yes! I'm going to be an Arctic explorer." "An Arctic explorer's life is full of hardship, Willie." "Yes. But I can stand 'em, I reckon." "I like your spirit, my boy. There is a great deal of glory to be gained in a career of that kind." "Yes. And you don't never have to wash your face."

STUBBS: "Well, sir, I gave it to that man straight, I can tell you. He is twice as big as I am, too, but I told him exactly what I thought of his rascally conduct right to his face, and I called him all the names in the dictionary, and a lot of others as well." Spudds: "And didn't he try to hit you, Jenkins?" Stubbs: "No, sir, he didn't. And when he tried to answer back, I just hung up the telephone receiver and walked away."



He Once Held a Nicer Hand.

SHE (half suspiciously): "Did you ever hold a hand that you would like to hold better than mine?" He: "Only once, darling. Then I had eleven trumps."

Nothing Left.

WIFE: "Wake up! There are thieves in the house!" Husband: "Go down and show them your new winter bonnet, and they won't waste any time looking for money here."

Fear Lent Strength.

POLICEMAN: "I don't see how a little woman like you succeeded in capturing and holding a big burglar like that." Little Woman (weakly): "It was dark, and I—I thought it was my husband trying to—to elope with the servant girl."

The Cow Knew.

FAIR MAIDEN (a summer boarder): "How savagely that cow looks at me!" Farmer Hayseed: "It's your red parasol, mum." Fair Maiden: "Dear me! I knew it was a little bit out of fashion, but I didn't suppose a country cow would notice it."

He Went without the Cellar.

"Will you keep a wine-cellar when you have a home of your own?" "Well, well," stammered the young man, "in the event of illness I think it well to be provided." "All right," the old man replied; "you can marry my daughter, but don't be surprised if I call on you twice a week and get taken ill."

What it all Means.

EACH eye she meets me at the gate—her brow has roses on it; and for one kiss she gives me eight (that means a winter bonnet). Each dish that most delights my eyes the table has upon it; and, "Dear, try this, and this," she cries (that means a winter bonnet). My slippers always are in sight; my smoking cap, I don it; she strokes my hair: "You're tired to-night" (that means a winter bonnet).

Scratched or Pinched?

HERE is a story of a ping-pong tournament. One young lady not being up to time, the secretary sent a verbal message to her house to inform her that if she did not come at once he should "scratch her." The maid, horrified at the want of courtesy in the use of the term she did not understand, endeavoured to soften the message by delivering it thus: "Please, miss, Mr. Jones says if you do not come at once he will pinch you."

Heard at the Post Office.

A YOUNG woman called at the post-office in a provincial town and bashfully inquired if there was a letter for her. "Business or love letter?" jokingly inquired the clerk. "Business!" was the reply, accompanied by a blush of the deepest crimson. As no such letter was to be found the young lady took her departure, but came back after a little while, and said in faltering accents: "Please, would you mind looking among the love letters?"

Why She Wanted Time.

SHE (after the proposal): "You must give me time." He: "To consider?" She: "No, to break off my last engagement."

In Case of Emergency.

A YOUNG lady who is partly deaf, is in the habit of answering "Yes" to everything when a gentleman is talking to her, for fear he might propose to her and she not hear it.

Making a Name for Herself.

FRIEND: "Your daughter seems determined to win a name for herself by writing." Papa: "Yes, she has answered over a hundred matrimonial advertisements, and isn't discouraged yet."

A Wasted Life.

HE: "Life with me has been a failure." She: "You must have had and wasted some opportunity." He: "No; I have spent half my life raising whiskers to conceal my youth, and the other half dyeing them to conceal my age."

Easily Collected.

"Ah, Professor, what a charming collection of stuffed birds you have here! Where did you get them from?" "Oh, that is quite simple. I have been collecting them for years from the worn-out hats of my seven daughters."

Johnnie was Careful.

"Now, Johnnie, go and kiss your little sweetheart and make it up," said Johnnie's mother. "No, I won't." "Go and tell her how much you love her, and how sorry you are." "No, I won't. Pa says he got into a breach of promise case by tellin' a girl that, and had to marry the old thing. I won't run any risks, I won't."

Wanted an Extra Flounce.

YOUNGER SISTER: "Mother, I think it is too bad; I am sixteen, and you make me wear such short dresses that it mortifies me terribly." Mother: "My dear, you cannot wear long dresses till your eldest sister is married." Younger Sister: "Well, she is as good as engaged to Mr. Doolittle, and I think I am entitled to an extra flounce."

How She Managed It.

"MADAM," said the judge sternly, "you must answer the question. What is your age?" "I was born in the same year your lordship was. That would make it about—" "It isn't necessary to go into particulars," interposed the judge stiffly. "Gentlemen, have you any further need for the witness? You may stand aside, madam."

Helping Papa.

A MINISTER's wife was starting out for a walk, and invited her little daughter to go with her. "No, mamma, I can't," was the very positive reply. "Why not?" "I have to help papa." "Help papa! In what way?" "Why, he told me to sit here in the corner and keep quiet while he wrote his sermon, and I don't believe he is half done yet."

Home Decoration.

MRS. FATPURSE: "You paint pictures to order, don't you?" Great Artist: "Yes, madam." Mrs. Fatpurse: "Well, I want a landscape, with lots of deer, and ducks, and quail, and pheasants, and cattle, and sheep, and pigs, and so on; you know; and put a lake and an ocean in—fresh and salt water, you know; and be sure to have plenty of fish swimming about, because it's for the dining-room."

My Two Loves.

I LOVE two women; both are good and kind; and one is tenderer than the infant dawn, full of wise counsels, loving as a fawn, and lover-like, to all my follies blind. The other, like a tender, blooming rose, shaking its sweets upon the air, shakes in my heart love's odours and doth bear life's sweetest pleasures as she goes. I love them fondly—unto both I'm true—Nay, blame them not! nor deem me free of speech, for I am loyal still and just to each! One is my mother, and one, sweet, is you.



A Madman's Bequest.

A STORY OF LOVE AND FORTUNE.

"AND that is all the message give him from you—'Kind Alf! His whole letter to me thing else but you alone! His body—nothing to him; and yet or 'send him even one kind

that I am to regards.' Poor is about no-mother is no-you won't give word!"

"Dear Mrs. Willoughby," replied the girl, earnestly. "I am very, very sorry; but, believe me, it is better for your son—for you, that I should remain just the boarder, and, if you will, the good friend of you both."

"I'm afraid Alf will not be satisfied with that! See what he says: 'This wretched fever, ague-smitten place is only tolerable to me when I think of her as a possible reward for my patience. Just tell her, mother, that even in Sierra Leone (the one spot on this earth that *must* have been created for human torture and punishment) I can endure if only I may hope. She knows how I love her; I believe, if she would but confess it, that she loves me. Ask her to write and tell me so, or if she will not do that, ask her to send me a message in your next letter. I suppose that she is still grinding away at that miserable typewriting. See that she doesn't overdo herself, for whether she will or whether she will not, her interests, her welfare will always be my one great heart concern!"

During the reading by Mrs. Willoughby of this extract Ella Staunton stood by the sitting-room window, drawing on her gloves.

"I am afraid I shall be late in the City," was all she said at last. Then, as if she thought that the mother's wistful pleading demanded some little word of recognition, she added, as she reached the door, "Say, please, that he knows why I am apparently unkind; but, that should anything ever arise which would enable me to act differently, I will not hesitate so to act; and of that he may be assured."

"Well," said Mrs. Willoughby, with a sigh, "I suppose he must be content with that crumb of comfort, small as it is; and I only hope that the time you speak of will come before my poor boy is quite finished up by that dreadful West Coast."

Ella Staunton had, for the past four years or more, been a boarder in Mrs. Willoughby's house in Chelsea; long enough, in fact, to look upon it in the light of "home."

It was only a small house, and beyond herself there were no other stranger inmates.

Mrs. Willoughby was the widow of a long deceased master mariner, with one son, between whom and herself there existed a truly ideal affection. The young fellow was not exactly of his father's profession, though of a very similar one, he being an electrical engineer on one of the cable ships of a certain big ocean telegraph company. Most of his time was passed upon the West Coast of Africa, his vessel being stationed for long spells off Freetown, Sierra Leone.

This was the only "crook in his mother's lot"—her son's many and long absences—so that had it not been for Ella's

presence in the house her loneliness would have been almost unbearable.

When, on his first home-coming after Ella's advent into the little Chelsea establishment, he saw daily a young girl, barely nineteen, who realised in her dainty little person, his most cherished ideas of womanhood, Alfred Willoughby began to wish that his lines were cast in a place not quite so distant from Chelsea Reach as Sierra Leone.

Ella, too, was undoubtedly attracted by the sunburnt young marine scientist, who, though unduly spare and out of sorts from a two years' residence among the mangroves, was in every way a manly man, while his experiences in "foreign parts" were of a kind to find favour with a girl, whose intelligence was well above the average.

Alfred Willoughby was not the sort of young fellow to wilfully neglect his opportunities; so that during his three months' leave it was no unusual thing for Ella to find him waiting for her of an evening at Sloane Square Station in order that he might walk up the King's Road with her.

That the inevitable should result was not wonderful—on one such occasion his love getting the better of his discretion.

It was undeniable that she had learnt to care for him; her tone and manner told him that; but it was also apparent that she was struck with the unexpectedness of the declaration.

Sensibly self-possessed, without being excessively so, she told him why, for the present at anyrate, there must be merely friendship between them.

"I have not a relative in the world," she said, "not one! As a child, of three or four, perhaps, I can just recollect a man—a big, rough, loud-voiced man—who about that time disappeared out of my life altogether. I have a faint remembrance also of a gentle, sad-eyed woman, who must have been my mother. In the house where she died I remained till I secured my present position, and came to live with your mother. A small yearly sum has been paid for my education and support, by whom I do not know. This annual payment suddenly ceased, however, last year, and my reason now for not saying what you wish me to say, is because I have made a determination to discover the identity of my mysterious benefactor. It may be that I shall, if I am successful, find a kinsman, and then, who knows what may happen. In the meanwhile, Mr. Willoughby, you may see someone else better suited for you than I am."

"Never!" was the fervent reply. "You will always be the one woman in the world for me! And I will wait and hope, with what patience I may, till you tell me finally, and in so many words, that you cannot love me."

The sun was beating down, blazing hot, upon the deck of the cable steamer *Hambria* as she lay at anchor off Freetown, Sierra Leone.

The mail had arrived that afternoon, and Alfred Willoughby, assistant electrician, was in his cabin, reading, for the fifth or sixth time, his mother's letter. He had dared to hope that there might possibly be inclosed a few lines from Ella, and could not help experiencing keen disappointment at finding none.

Still, the outlook was not so completely dark, for did she

not speak of "something" which might happen, and which would make for happiness for both of them?

"If this thing should be," he said to himself, "'she will not hesitate to act.' Yes, but will it!—will it? This man she once spoke of to me, and the mysterious benefactor, are they one and the same? And if so, who is he? What is he? Where is he?"

These thought-inquiries were to be answered sooner than the querist imagined, and in a way the most romantic and the most unexpected.

The next morning, soon after breakfast, a small steamer, evidently of the "tramp" species, was seen to be coming in towards the inner anchorage.

She was dirty, high out of the water, and pitched and rolled in a manner that must have been highly inconvenient to those on board her.

Having nothing particular to do Alfred Willoughby watched the newcomer till at last she "let go" within a few cables' length of the *Hambria*.

She was a stranger to everybody on board the latter vessel, though one man in the stokehold declared that he knew her, having come across her at Loanda a year or so previously. At that time, he said, she was trading for ivory; for anything indeed in the intrinsically valuable way. Her reputation was not by any means "sweet" on both the south-west and east coasts, rumours of "black business," in connection with Zanzibar and other neighbouring "slave centres" being unpleasantly rife.

To the surprise of the captain of the *Hambria*, a boat put off and made for them, its one passenger being evidently the tramp's skipper.

Willoughby happened to be near the gangway as the stranger stepped on to the *Hambria's* deck.

The latter was a short, thick-set man, of nearer sixty than fifty, slovenly dressed, and with a curt, sharp manner approaching closely to the uncivil:

"Mornin'!—are you the skipper?" he jerked out.

The young electrician assured him that he was not, and indicated the captain, who now came down from the bridge.

"Ah!—mornin', sir! Just got in from St. Jago, Cape de Verdes. Have you got anything in the shape of medicine you could let me have? My medicine-chest's run out; and I'm bad—been bad for a week now."

"What's the matter with you?" asked Captain Price.

"Don't quite know. It's this blamed climate! I don't often put in here; not once in twelve months, but I couldn't stick it out till we should get to Loanda."

"Of course not! My doctor's on shore for a day or two, shooting, but you're welcome to anything out of my medicine-chest, Captain—er—"

"Morris, sir!—Samuel Morris; skipper and owner of the steamship *Golden Land*, trading between the Cape de Verde's and anywhere between Loanda and Zanzibar."

"Been long on these coasts, Captain Morris?"

"Close on eighteen years now! Haven't seen or touched British soil, for all that while. I did think of paying the old place a visit this autumn; there's someone I'd like to see, and say something to, but it don't look much like as if I'm going to get there."

"Oh, you'll soon get all right. Either I or our assistant electrician, Mr. Willoughby, will pay you a visit later on, to see how you get on."

Before answering Captain Morris bent his thick eyebrows and gave a keen, scrutinising glance at both Captain Price and Willoughby.

Then, apparently satisfied, he said: "Glad to see you—if I'm alive!"

"Oh, you're not dead yet. Come and get what you want in the drug way."

In ten minutes he was on his way back to his own vessel, the *Hambria's* captain expressing his opinion that the "man was suffering from some mind trouble, which was acting upon his body; and that he was evidently in a bad state."

(Continued on next page.)

Christmas Eating—and After.

"What a blessing is a good digestion," exclaimed Anthony Trollope, and thousands since have repeated his words. About Xmas time, however, the other side of the subject which may be expressed in the exclamation, "What a curse is a bad digestion," is most commonly before one's mind. A very distinguished physician has said, "I think the cause of most of the maladies of the human race lies in their stuffing their digestive organs to excess."

This expresses in very blunt fashion the truth borne home at Xmastide. Indigestion, the result of Xmas eating and drinking, is at this period painfully rife. As a handy, safe and reliable cure not only for indigestion, but for heartburn, sour stomach, headache, and other symptoms of Xmas indiscretions in diet, Chas. Forde's bile beans are unequalled.

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"Look here, Willoughby!—you go across to that old iron kettle of his by-and-by, and have a look at him."

"Right you are, sir! I'll go after dinner."

When in three or four hours' time Willoughby boarded the *Golden Land*, a deck-hand answered his inquiry for the skipper by simply pointing in the direction of the after cabin.

No one was in the small saloon, out of which four berths opened. One, the captain's, had its door ajar.

Pushing the latter open, Willoughby saw its inmate lying, fully dressed, upon the swinging cot.

In even those few hours the man was changed for the worse; for his features were pale and drawn, while his breath came in laboured gasps.

He saw Willoughby, and motioned him nearer with a feeble lifting of his hand.

There was some brandy on the fixed bureau and Willoughby poured some out and gave it to him.

It did him good in a way, for in a minute or two he seemed to gather strength.

"Where do you live?" was his curious query, made in so low a voice that the other was obliged to stoop in order to hear.

"When I am at home, you mean? In London—Chelsea."

"I am dying—I know it—put your hand under my pillow—take out a letter you will find there. Yes, that's it."

It was in a foolscap envelope and very bulky.

"Do you see the name, and the address upon it?" asked the sick man.

For the moment Willoughby could not make it out, in the dim light of the one oil lamp.

Holding the letter close to the light, what he saw there made him start as if he had been shot.

Written in large but shaky characters was *Miss Ella Staunton, 18 Blythe Road, Hammersmith, London.*

"You know her!" cried the other excitedly, but in a weak voice.

"I—I know a young lady of that name; but she does not live there."

"No!—where—where does she live—your friend, I mean?"

"She lives with my mother in Chelsea."

"It must be!—it must be!" muttered the dying man. "If it is—she will know that address. Listen!"

"Yes; I am listening."

"Open that drawer!" pointing to the top drawer of the bureau. "Now—that box in the left-hand corner. That is it—open it."

It was full of sovereigns, to the amount, Willoughby thought of several hundred pounds.

"That money!—you see it!—take it!—leave your ship—take passage in next mail for England, and—and deliver that letter to Ella Staunton—my—my step-daughter."

"Then you were—"

"Her mother's husband."

By this time the man had become exhausted, and when Willoughby asked him if the letter would make its recipient fully acquainted with all that she ought to know, he just nodded his head ever so slightly and closed his eyes.

Thinking it strange that no one came to attend upon the dying skipper, Willoughby went out upon deck and spoke to the sailor-man whom he had first seen.

"Where is the steward?" he asked, "or one of the officers?"

"There's no one aboard except me, the engine-room lot, and six more, as is asleep, dead beat, in the fo'c'sle. Everybody else left the ship at St. Jago. They said the skipper was mad. What's the matter with him now?"

"He's dying!"

"Dying!"

"Yes—and you had better go and see what you can do for him. I'll go back to my own ship first, and then will get the Consul to put an officer in charge of you. However you managed to get here from the Cape de Verde's I don't know."

"Nor I, sir—it's the cherub that sits aloft as must have done it!"

Without bandying any more words, Willoughby went back to the *Hambria*, handing over the box of money to Captain Price for safe keeping.

He then very much astonished that worthy seaman by announcing that, on the mail steamer's call in six days, he meant to throw up his post on board, and take passage for home.

Asked for an explanation, he gave it, by repeating all that he had seen and heard on board the *Golden Land*.

"Well, it's one of the most extraordinary things I have ever known," was Captain Price's comment. "And now you had better return to the poor chap yonder, while I send Hutton (the second officer) on shore to the Consul."

When Willoughby found himself again in the cabin on board the *Golden Land*, it was to see a dead man.

The deck-hand was there, and said that the end had come almost before Willoughby reached the *Hambria*.

Obviously there was nothing more for the latter to do, beyond impressing upon the sailor that everything in the late skipper's cabin must be scrupulously left untouched till the Consul or his representative arrived. Then, with a last look at the face of the man, who, though dead, was to be the means of giving to him the one thing on earth that he most desired, he turned and made for his boat.

Six days afterwards he stood by the hurricane-deck rail of the Union Mail steamer *Matabelé*, as she moved swiftly seawards, and watched the rapidly receding hull of the dirty little "tramp," the *Golden Land*, that at length became but a mere small black patch, and then disappeared altogether.

The little household in More Street, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, was more than usually quiet on a certain evening in September.

Mrs. Willoughby and her fair boarder were alike thinking the same thoughts.

The African mail was several days overdue, and the newspapers were chronicling daily storm, disaster and loss of life.

The mother could not conceal her anxiety, while Ella, putting aside all other considerations, betrayed herself by her tender comforting of the parent of the man, who, she told herself, might never more be kept out of her heart, if, indeed, he had ever been really out of it.

It was long past the widow's usual time for "locking-up," but neither felt inclined for sleep, and both sat on talking to each other and waiting for they knew not what.

At last two o'clock sounded from the tower of old Chelsea Church, and, as the second stroke died away, the rumble of a cab became more and more audible through the night—or morning stillness, till it stopped at the door of the house in which the two women sat looking into each other's eyes and reflecting on another's thoughts and fears.

"No! no!—not you!—let me go!" said Ella, as a vigorous knock and ring thundered and jangled through the house.

The man upon the doorstep will always carry in his mind's eye the picture of the girl, holding a lamp above her head, and looking at him in solemn wonder, which would not let her speak.

She was not quite conscious of his presence until, in the little parlour, she saw him, with his mother's

(Concluded on page 862.)



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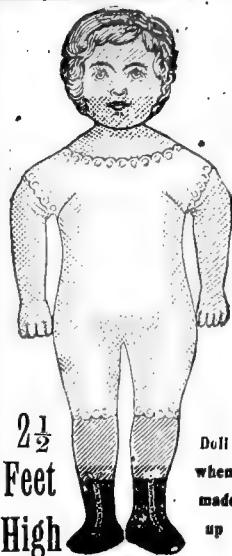
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arms round his neck; his mother's head buried in his breast.

She was not hurt or envious, for with the unselfishness of a great love, she was content that the mother should have pride of place.

And she had her reward.

"I have found him!" he said to her.

"Found him?" she echoed.

"Yes—and I bring you a message—from the dead!"

He placed the packet in her hands, but it was not till the next day that the strange tale was told, and the message read.

Samuel Morris, twenty years before, had married Mary Staunton, the young widow of a man, who had left her but ill-provided for, and with one child, a daughter.

For some strange reason, Morris took a strong dislike to the little Ella, a dislike, which, on his wife's death two years after marriage, developed into an uncontrollable jealous hatred.

His wife buried, he made arrangements for the child being looked after by the woman in whose house the mother died, and departed for Africa.

A man of abundant means, he invested a portion of his capital in the purchase of a small steamer of 800 tons burden, named her the *Golden Land*, and for the next eighteen years carried on a lucrative traffic in ivory, and like valuable matter, in the process, amassing a big fortune.

His almost ferocious eccentricity had won for him among his men the name of the "mad skipper," a title he fully deserved.

All this was confessed and related in the long communication brought to England by Alfred Willoughby.

Morris, in that document, went on to say that, being desirous of making some sort of reparation to his innocent step-daughter, he had long since had his will drawn up, by which he had bequeathed to her everything he possessed.

The will he had already forwarded to London, and it was in the hands of the agents, through whom Ella's maintenance-money had been paid.

There was only one condition annexed to the legacy, a strange one, seeing that the testator was himself a seaman.

The condition was expressed in the following clause in the will.

Whereas, if the said Ella Staunton shall at any time, either before or after receipt of the property herein bequeathed to her, marry a sailor, or anyone earning their living on the sea, or following the sea in any way as a vocation, she shall immediately forfeit such property, and it shall pass in its entirety to the Royal Society for Indigent Master Mariners, Belvedere, Kent.

"Then good-bye to happiness!" said Alfred, "unless you think, dear, that a poor electrical engineer's pay would induce you to break the condition."

"No," she said, with a peculiar smile. "I shall not break it; I shall keep it to the letter!"

He looked at her, trying to fathom her meaning.

But the smile did not die away. If anything it expanded, and became very tender and sweet.

"Can you not see," she said, "how I may keep this condition, and yet—yet—?"

"No," he replied. "I am blind, I suppose."

"That is just it," she said. "You are blind. What is to prevent you from giving up the sea, from this moment, and becoming a landsman?"

"But how am I to live?"

"Easily, for you are worth the best part of fifty thousand pounds."

"I?"

"Yes, you! For as you brought it to me it is yours, dear, and if you will but vouchsafe me enough to buy me my gowns, I shall be content, and you—"

"I," he interrupted her, taking her in his arms, "I, too, am content, though I would that money and condition were both at the bottom of the sea."

Ralph Enderby.

"You have no right to imprison me as a vagrant," said a lame beggar to a magistrate. "You have no visible means of support," replied the judge. "Yes, I have. What's the matter with this crutch?"

"SEE that man," said one of two people who were talking about success in life. "Yes." "He has left behind lots of people who struggled to overtake him." "Who is he?" "Conductor of a tramcar."

TEACHER: "Why was Solomon the wisest man in the world?" Boy: "He had so many wives to advise him." Teacher (a strong-minded female): "Well, that is not the answer in the book, but you may go up top."

Mrs. Grumps: "I s'pose you'll word your will so that I won't get a penny if I marry again. You're mean enough." Mr. Grumps: "No, my dear. I have merely inserted a wish that if you marry again it shall be Mr. John Jimson. He and I were boys together. He licked me once."

WIFE (returned from church to her husband, who had stayed at home): "You should have heard Dr. Doe's sermon this morning, my dear. I don't know when anything has made such a profound impression upon me. I think it will make a better woman of me as long as I live." Husband: "Did you walk home?" Wife: "No, I took a tramcar; and, do you know, John, the conductor never asked me for my fare, and so I saved twopence. Wasn't I lucky?"



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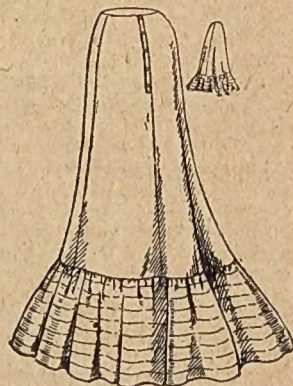
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Cynthia.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette.

All communications must in future be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.]

Two Girls and a Man.

FOR some time "ELLA" tells me she has been attracted towards a young man whom she had known by sight. From his appearance he showed that he wished to meet her. By a fortunate train of circumstances, they got to know each other, had several meetings, and found that they had much in common. When their friendship was fairly established, "ELLA" introduced him to her greatest girl friend. From that moment, he seemed to lose all interest in "ELLA," and to be entirely in love with the friend. In a very short time "ELLA" felt that she had completely lost him. Then, suddenly, the man and "ELLA's" friend became estranged, and he disappeared. They saw nothing of him for months.

"ELLA" has now met the man again. What attitude should she take up towards him? Do I think she should drop him altogether, seeing that he is evidently not fond of her? To this my answer is "No." Cultivate each other's friendship. You do not know what may come of it. His affair with your friend was apparently simply an infatuation and had no lasting qualities. You say you and he have much in common. Well, there is more hope in that simple bond than there is in the majority of infatuations.

Calf Lovers.

Does a girl of seventeen know her own mind? "ANXIOUS" is that age, and is deeply in love with a girl of the same age. Do I, he asks, think she will change before long?

How can I say, "ANXIOUS," not knowing the girl? I have known girls who have fallen in love at seventeen and never afterwards looked at another man but their early love. It all depends on the girl. If she changes her mind, then most likely you will change yours. Even boys of seventeen, you know, are not carved out of stone, and often enough are as changeable as girls. Don't worry about the future. If you are fond of each other now, enjoy it as long as you may. Neither you nor I can prophesy what may happen as you both grow older.

A One-Sided Love Affair.

"H. F." is a young man of nineteen, who goes out frequently with a girl of his own age. He does not care for her, he tells me, but thinks she is very fond indeed of him, which makes him reluctant to break the news of his own indifference to her.

I think "H. F." had better say nothing at all. There is no need to make the girl unhappy. Besides, in time he may get to really love her, and will then have a very different story to pour into her ears. Let him wait until things reach some definite stage, and in the meantime be as nice to the girl as he can.

What to Do with our Parents.

AMONG the questions which a love adviser is regularly called on to answer is "What shall we do with our fathers?" It is constantly happening that, just as a young couple have discovered that they are all-in-all to each other, one of these monsters steps in and with callous brutality shatters their young dream. To-day I have a long story from "CHESTERFIELD," too long to relate in full. But briefly it is this: For two and a half years he has been intimate with a girl, and last summer got her parents' consent to their engagement. Then he fell out of work, and remained so for five weeks, when her father told him that he must cease the engagement, and forbade him to see his daughter any more, or to write to her.

Well, as "CHESTERFIELD" and the girl are about as much in love with each other as it is possible to be, it is hardly likely either of them obeyed this harsh command. Of course they corresponded and saw each other secretly. Things came to a head when the father told "CHESTERFIELD" he must either take back his engagement ring, or the girl must leave home. Of course, this put my correspondent in a quandary. He could not take her from home, neither did he wish to take away the ring.

In one respect, "CHESTERFIELD," the father is quite right. While you were out of work, naturally he could scarcely look with favour on your continued engagement. Of course, I do not know the circumstances, but did you really do all in your power to get fresh employment? Did you persuade her father that you were really worthy of her and able to make your position? Until I know that I fear I can scarcely say the parent was in the wrong. You will, of course, see that the only thing to do is for you to really work as hard as you can and prove to the father that you are able to support his daughter. This may take a year or more, but it would be the best way to prove your love for her even if it meant your sacrificing for a time each other's society. Until you do this, her father may well say that your engagement must be held over. So all I can advise you to do is to work hard, and bring matters back to their original position.

The Dancing Question.

No, "ADA," I do not think you are right in trying to prevent your fiancé from dancing with other girls. It may make you jealous to see him whirling round a room with his arm round someone else's waist, but probably he is enjoying himself no more than you are. He is simply obeying the rules of etiquette, and acting like a gentleman. And I am sure you like your fiancé to do that, don't you? Only, I think, if I were you, I should try to impress upon him the advisability of selecting the older and less beautiful ladies as partners. You can easily convince him that they are much better for him in every way.

May He Send a Christmas Card?

"C. T. S."—There is no rule as to how long you must have known anyone before sending them a Christmas card. You say you met a certain lady three weeks ago, and want to send her a card. Well, if your acquaintance was simply a very slight one, and did not develop into any kind of cordial friendship—or, perhaps, a deeper sentiment—I think it would be going rather far to send a Christmas card. But if you and she struck up anything like an intimate acquaintance then you are at liberty to send her what you like.

"MABEL."—As the young man has told mutual friends he has lost his heart to you, why not convey to those same friends the fact that you are similarly affected towards him. As the pleasant news has reached you through them, the equally pleasant news to him of your own feelings might filter through in the same way.

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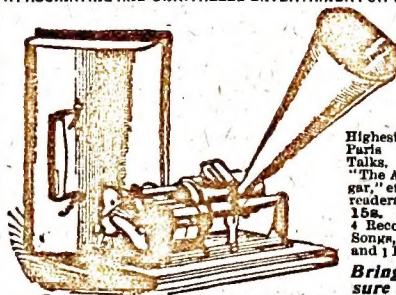
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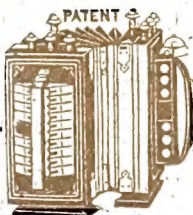


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